
Universidad de Navarra
Facultad de Teología

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The sacrament is in crisis

A theological analysis on the issues of the sacrament
of reconciliation based on some of the North American
authors in relation to the sacramental conviction
in *reconciliatio et paenitentia* of John Paul II

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Presentation

Abstract: The study aims to identify some of the issues of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and gives a theological analysis on issues using the fundamental convictions of John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*.

The authors have common observations that the crisis is caused mainly by the wrong understanding of the theology of sin and of the wrong understanding of the sacrament itself. The main problem around sin is rooted on the loss of sense of sin, the radical emphasis of social sin, and the previous understanding of the sacrament as a transgression of the law. The authors have a common trend in defining sin as ruptures of relationship.

On the other hand, the issues on the understanding of the sacrament are more complicated. It involves different fields of theology, which includes the biblical foundation, the wider understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation, the power as given to the community, justification, third rite and the integral acts of confession.

The last part deals on the theological analysis of the issues of the sacrament. The fundamental elements presented by John Paul II are good foundations in giving some clarifications to the majority of the issues.

The investigation observes that the radical implementation of the different emphasis of theology is one of the main roots of the crisis. It is also evident that the selected authors are concerned more with a more communal and pastoral celebration. Nevertheless, the fundamental conviction of John Paul II gives balance to the growing investigation situates us to the present condition of the sacrament in the Church that helps us how to revitalize and understand the real essence of the sacrament.

Keywords: sin, sacrament of reconciliation, Theology in North America

Resumen: Nuestro estudio se centra en tres grandes temas: un planteamiento de cuestiones variadas que tienen como instrumento de base algunas obras teológicas producidas en el área norte-americana; la presentación de las convicciones fundamentales de Juan Pablo II en torno al Sacramento de la Reconciliación en su Exhortación Apostólica en *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*; y finalmente, un análisis teológico de algunas comprensiones incorrectas en relación al pecado y al Sacramento de la Reconciliación.

La reflexión teológica sobre el pecado pone de manifiesto -según esos autores- cómo la manera de comprenderlo afecta en mayor o menor medida a la visión teológica sobre el Sacramento de la Reconciliación. En efecto, la recta intelección y la praxis del Sacramento fueron trastocadas, principalmente, por esos factores: en primer lugar, se encuentran la pérdida del sentido del pecado a causa de la influencia de la cultura, aumento del uso de terapias psicológicas en el intento de sustituir al Sacramento, la inconsciencia del hecho de haber pecado, y una errónea comprensión de la limitación humana; un segundo factor es el énfasis radical en la dimensión social del pecado a tal punto de abandonar su dimensión personal; finalmente, hay que mencionar también la comprensión que se tenía del pecado como trasgresión de la ley. Generalmente, esos autores suelen explicar que el pecado es una ruptura de relaciones.

Esa comprensión moderna del Sacramento de la Reconciliación es muy compleja, puesto que en ella no están presentes solamente algunas cuestiones que en el pasado se consideraban fundamentales, sino que también entran en diálogo diversos campos de la teología. Como muestra de esa complejidad será suficiente con citar algunas temas que están en juego: la interpretación de los pasajes de la Escritura que fundamentan el Sacramento y la misión general de Reconciliación que tiene la Iglesia; la amplia utilización que tuvo la palabra "Reconciliación", aplicada a Cristo, a la Iglesia y a los otros Sacramentos; la autoridad para perdonar los pecados considerada como un derecho de toda la comunidad cristiana; las cuestiones en torno a la historia del Sacramento, las críticas al Concilio de Trento; el uso indiscreto del tercer rito penitencial; los actos integrales de confesión; algunas cuestiones pastorales.

Nuestra investigación hace notar que la raíz de la causa de la crisis que se ha dado en la comprensión en la praxis del Sacramento no es solamente el malentendido acerca del sentido del pecado y del Sacramento, sino también los mismos cambios de énfasis. En efecto, muchos teólogos dan tanta importancia a la novedad teológica hasta el punto de no lograr la integración de lo nuevo con lo anteriormente vigente, lo cual lleva a una discontinuidad en la comprensión de la fe y vivencia del Sacramento.

La restauración del aspecto comunitario del Sacramento de la Reconciliación y la celebración pastoral son también objetos de reflexión para algunos de los autores, pero tienen distintos modos de tratar esa dimensión del Sacramento. Hay que decir que, aunque los diversos autores intenten presentar algunas respuestas sobre las más variadas cuestiones, algunas opiniones contribuyen a la confusión sobre la verdad del Sacramento. Por ello, las convicciones de Juan Pablo II son una luz para identificar los diversos elementos que deben ser considerados en relación al Sacramento, tanto lo que ha de acogerse de los planteamientos modernos, como lo que ha de ser rechazado.

La investigación nos sitúa en el presente de la teología en relación al Sacramento de la Reconciliación como ayuda a la hora de entenderlo y vivirlo. Nuestro estudio concluye, entre otras cosas, la importancia de restaurar el sentido del pecado y la necesidad de la evangelización y de dar doctrina (catequesis). Todo ello, sin duda, va a la par con la necesidad de mantener las convicciones fundamentales -expresadas por Juan Pablo II- sobre el Sacramento de la Reconciliación.

Palabras clave: pecado, sacramento de la reconciliación, Teología en América del Norte

An incident in a grocery store five years ago is still vivid in my mind when I overheard a friend of mine asking the grocery owner to just accept his payment for what he bought instead of paying it to the cashier. The owner refused to accede to the request but asked him to pay to the cashier.

Their conversation made me reflect on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What my friend was asking from the owner seems to be the same question that many of the Christians are pondering. «Can I just pay what I bought directly to you?» Maybe what is in the mind of my friend is that «why can I not pay directly to you, you are the owner of this store? You can even decide to give me a discount or not let me pay at all?» But still, the owner did not accept that my friend pays what he has bought directly to him. The same thing with confession, people are wondering if they «can just ask for forgiveness directly to God?» But just like the grocery owner who insisted that my friend pays to the cashier, so is God pointing to the person to whom he entrusted the authority to forgive sins – to the ordained priest.

The forgiveness of grave sin is made available to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our basic Catechism teaches us that the Church must continue Christ's work of healing and salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit¹. God never gets tired of giving grace and forgiveness to repentant sinners through the Sacrament He has instituted in the Church. The Church is consistent in his teaching that through the Sacrament man obtains pardon from God's mercy and he is reconciled again with God and with the Church which they also have wounded by their sins².

What is the place of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Church and in the world today? First, after the Vatican Council, the name has been changed from the Sacrament of Confession or Penance to Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the new *Ordo Paenitentiae*, the Church offers ways of celebrating the Sacrament. Additionally the term sacrament of reconciliation has been understood nowadays in a wider context. Emphasis has been given to Christ as a primordial sacrament of reconciliation and to the Church as a basic sacrament of reconciliation. Even the Church gives emphasis on the different manifestations of reconciliation where the Sacrament of Penance maybe considered among the forms of reconciliation in the Church. Even if there are other forms of reconciliation, the Sacrament is considered the only ordinary way to forgive grave sins and other reconciliatory rites can never be alternatives.

Secondly, the Church has observed that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is in crisis. This has been mentioned by John Paul II many times and this can

only be overcome by resolute and patient pastoral efforts.³ The decline of those who avail of the Sacrament is one of the evidences of the existing crisis, and the worst effect of the loss of the sense of sin and of the crisis of the Sacrament is the denial of the existence of God⁴.

However, the Church constantly exerts effort to bring back the people to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In 1983, the theme of the Synod of Bishops was about *Penance and Reconciliation in the Mission of the Church*. As a result, John Paul II published the post synodal apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*. In spite of the response of the Church towards the crisis, the Church still continues to revitalize the understanding and the practice of the Sacrament⁵. It is the same challenge that Benedict XVI exhorted the bishops three years ago to continue the promotion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁶.

Notes of the Presentation

1. «The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members.» *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Double Day, CO., 1997), no. 319. (Hereafter, «CCC»).
2. Cfr. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 11. (Hereafter, *LG*).
3. «The present crisis of the Sacrament of Penance... which I have voiced my concern from the beginning of my Pontificate will be overcome by resolute and patient pastoral efforts.» Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Adbortatio Apostolica Post Synodalis Ecclesia in America*, no. 32 in *AAS*, vol. 91 pars. II (22 January, 1999), p. 766.
- 4 Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1984), no. 18 (Hereafter *ReP*).
- 5 John Paul II has been inviting the Church to make every effort to face the crisis, and recover the frequent celebration of the sacrament. He states «With these words, I intended, as I do now, to encourage my Brother Bishops and earnestly appeal to them –and, through them, to all priests– to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.» Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Misericordia Dei, De Sacramenti Penitentiae Celebratione Quedam Rationes Explicantur*, no 2, in *AAS*, vol. 94, pars 2, 7 Aprilis 2002. (Hereafter «MD»).
- 6 «I wish therefore to commend your promotion of the Sacrament of Penance. While this Sacrament is often considered with indifference, what it effects is precisely the fullness of healing for which we long.» BENEDICT XVI, *Al Presuli Della Conferenza Episcopale Del Canada Occidentale in Visita «Ad Limina»* (October 9, 2006), in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, II,2 (2006), p. 415.

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I. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MANUALS AND THE ISSUES AROUND SIN

1. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EACH MANUAL

The study tries to give a critical and theological analysis regarding the content of each manual. There are some general observations regarding the works of the authors. One thing that is apparent in the presentation of the authors is that, majority of them are pastorally inclined. They enhance a more communal celebration and an active participation of the sacrament. There is a trend that those who claim of a communal celebration have the tendency to disregard the previous celebration of the sacrament.

1.1. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion

M. Hellwig is influenced by the current understanding of sin. It is more of a relationship rather than as a violation of the law. It is God-centered rather than law-centered. That is why she considers sins as focusing other than God. She claims that sin primarily concerns man's relationship with God. She criticizes the too much concern of the law. This is the renewed theology of the nature of sin, focusing on relationship rather than violation.

Her idea of repentance is centered on a real internal and external conversion. That is why she exposes the different negative reaction and experience of the penitent in confession. She questions why is it that the conversion seldom manifests in the external life of the person? She never doubted the internal

effect of the sacrament only that most of the time the external manifestation is missing. She affirms that forgiveness of sins happens in the sacrament of reconciliation. But her question lies on the real conversion of the person to manifest some changes and conversion in his life after he avails of the sacrament. She is tired of listening to the claim that the effect is something hidden, and spiritual. She is after an effect that is not just spiritual but something that manifests externally. She wants to reexamine the way the sacrament is celebrated to express and offer real conversion to the people.

This observation of M. Hellwig leads us to reflect and evaluate how the Church fulfills her task of making conversion apparent in the life of a person. It is a challenge that M. Hellwig and many faithful are craving for in the celebration of the sacrament. It is how every penitent can experience real conversion in the sacrament and make it more effective.

Looking at the real issue of making conversion evident to the penitent is not the question of the way the sacrament is celebrated but more on how the Church helps the penitent in becoming aware of his sinfulness and being able to prepare well before availing of the sacrament. The preparation of the person before availing of the sacrament really matters in the celebration of the sacrament. There are times the penitent just goes directly to the confessional box without disposing himself well with the grace of God. The need of the examination of conscience and be sorry of his sins before availing of the sacrament, means lot for the conversion of the person. In the story of the prodigal son, conversion does not happen when the younger son meets his father; rather conversion happens and starts when he realizes his fault while still experiencing emptiness of his life. Reconciliation and forgiveness of sins happen in his encounter with the father.

It is the same thing with the sacrament. Conversion does not happen after man avails of the sacrament, but rather it is a process and it starts when man begins to respond to the calling of God towards conversion. The Church has a task of helping every penitent towards experiencing a deeper meaning of conversion even before availing of the sacrament. So that when a person avails of the sacrament, the effects of the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation that the sacrament offers become very meaningful to the penitent.

Since the issue that is being asked by M. Hellwig is the deeper experience of conversion, then the issue does not pertain per se in the sacrament but in the disposition of the penitent with the help of the Church. This also makes clear the distinction between the role of the priest and the role of the member

of the Church. Each has a task in calling the sinners towards conversion but it is the ordained priest who is given the task to forgive sins and become minister of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Like that of K. Osborne, M. Hellwig tries to bring out the issue on the absolute gratuity of the grace of God. Her theology about the image of God is centered on the idea that God welcomes back all who return to Him. She claims that God always forgives repentant sinners and anybody who repents. She mentions this teaching to promote the third rite wherein the repentant sinner is presenting himself to the grace of God.

There is no question with the unconditional mercy of God and his readiness to forgive repentant sinners. In conversion, it is not just God calling the sinners, but it also involves man's response to manifest externally. That is why, it is a wrong interpretation that giving an importance to the acts of the penitent contradicts the teaching of the absolute gratuity of the grace of God.

Although M. Hellwig never speaks against the practice of the individual confession, it appears that she does not consider confession as mandated by God as the means of the forgiveness of sins. An example is the way she understands the parable of the prodigal son. She states that the father stops the son from telling his sins because what is more important is contrition and enumerating one's sin does not matter to God. Nevertheless as the study mentions, that kind of interpretation is out of the context of the story of the prodigal son. The act of the father can never be interpreted that confessing one's sin is not essential in the celebration of the sacrament. Indeed, the son speaks how sorry he is of his sins.

Another noticeable claim in the work of M. Hellwig is her conviction that the work of reconciliation is given to the whole Church and not just to a priest. She even mentions that «The power so vested in the Church was now seen as unequivocally linked to priestly ordination.»¹ Of course she is not referring to the power and authority of the priest to absolve and forgive sins. Since for her, the sacrament is more of a sign of reconciliation than forgiveness of sins. She is just more concerned of the involvement of the whole Church rather than to celebrate it with the priest alone. Her concern is more pastoral on how to celebrate the sacrament in a more communal way wherein the penitent is reconciled with God and with the whole Church.

It must be noted that she does not deny that the ordained priest is the proper minister of the sacrament of reconciliation, but neither does she also affirm that only the ordained minister can be the minister of the sacrament.

Her understanding of the minister of the sacrament is not as somebody appointed by Christ but somebody appointed by the Church. For her, she considers sacrament as instituted to the Church in general and the Church hands down the responsibility to the ordained which previously is the responsibility of the whole church.

M. Hellwig gives the distinction between the ordained priest and the rest of the faithful, «The ordained is that he ministers an official sacrament of the Church in behalf of the institutional Church while all Christians are called to be sacraments of reconciliation to one another and to the world; they are called to minister to others by mediating reconciliation and conversion whenever they can.»² The word she uses is that the minister acts in behalf not of Christ but of the institutional Church. But it has mentioned in the previous chapter, the minister must be considered primarily a representative of Christ, and only secondary as a minister of the Church.

The presentation of M. Hellwig of the sacrament of Reconciliation has also a Christological dimension by presenting the connection of the sacrament to the ministry of Christ. It is not just because it is instituted by Christ, but rather that conversion, reconciliation and repentance become possible because Christ died for us. But she does not elaborate them in detail because the emphasis of her manual is more of a pastoral dimension. Because of her too much concern on pastoral, her presentation of the sacrament lacks spiritual dimension most especially on how she presents the role of the minister in the sacrament. One has to bear it in mind that sacrament is concerned with man's relationship with God and just secondarily with the Church.

1.2. *Theological Analysis of the Manual To Walk Together Again:* The Sacrament of Reconciliation

«It is an invitation to make the sacrament more than just a routine recitation of fault but also to make it a healing encounter with the undefeatable love of God.»³ This is the aim of the manual of R. Gula. Like any other author, the previous practice of the sacrament is criticized as a routine practice without understanding it and without any visible effect to a penitent. R. Gula wants a more fruitful and meaningful celebration wherein a person can really experience a real encounter with God. It is to enhance the experience of healing and conversion, which most people try to seek in and through the sacrament.

As a moralist, he is one of those authors who discuss about sin, and Christian moral life that speaks about the existence of the law, relationship, and responsibility. He disputes with the past concept of sin as a transgression of the law but promoting sin in connection to relationship.

It is observed that the conversion that he questions is the same issue that M. Hellwig tries to present. He is concerned with the real experience of reconciliation and conversion. It is something that manifests in the life of the person. Conversion can happen outside the sacrament and even prior to the celebration of the sacrament. But for R. Gula, it is not only conversion that can happen, but rather conversion must first occur before celebrating the sacrament, otherwise one can never experience the real meaning of the sacrament. He states that «Only when reconciliation becomes a reality in our lives will the sacrament of reconciliation make sense»⁴

R. Gula gives emphasis on the understanding of the theology of the sacrament of reconciliation as God's action. It is God who initiates and invites us towards conversion and man responds to the invitation of God. This invitation happens not during the celebration of the sacrament but before. That is why R. Gula states that it is not an experience that we do not have yet, because it is already present when man becomes aware of the invitation of God towards conversion. Retrieving our experience with God is the first step towards conversion.

This understanding that conversion happens before the celebration is not something new in the theology of the sacrament. In the celebration of the sacrament, it presupposes that man is already sorry of his sins. The first act of the penitent is the act of contrition that can be understood as the starting point of conversion.

The presentation R. Gula of conversion and reconciliation before the celebration is just going deeper on the experience of contrition. It includes being sorry of his sin, amendments, and the desire of asking for forgiveness. But R. Gula does not mention it as referring to contrition, but simply claim that reconciliation needs to happen before the celebration.

The study would like to comment with the term used by R. Gula when he says, 'that sacraments do not give us something we do not already have and that is just a matter of deepening one's experience.' The sacrament does not give an instant conversion that happens during the celebration but rather the experience of conversion happens prior to the celebration. It is the experience of conversion that moves the person to avail of the sacrament.

R. Gula has a point in saying that without a prior conversion, the sacrament can never be celebrated well. Without contrition prior to confession, the sacrament is insignificant. Nevertheless, the study does not affirm that the sacrament does not give something. But rather it gives much more than just an experience of conversion. Because it is in the sacrament that forgiveness of sins happen, the relationship with God ruptured by sin, is being restored. The celebration is not just deepening the experience but rather it is culminating the prior experience with receiving back the grace of God.

R. Gula in his work, also criticized the previous way of confessing one's sin. He gives two models of confessing one's sins to show how the shift of emphasis affects the celebration of the sacrament. The first model is the previous way of confessing sin:

Bless me father for I have sinned, it has been four weeks since my last confession, the following are my sins: I was angry three times, I lied four times, I entertained pure thoughts and desires three times... I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life. I ask pardon of God, penance and absolution from you...⁵

And the other model is,

Today I come to confess before God and you that over the past month I have been responsible for allowing love to grow cold in my home and at the office. I have done this by making it difficult for some of our junior executives to have all the data. I am just envious of their talent. I resent their accomplishment, I have been so preoccupied with this that I have been inattentive to simple needs of my wife and children at home. I regret that I have become so self centered this month. I want to give the encouragement that my junior partners need and to give my family more time and attention.⁶

He considers the first model of confession as dealing sin in a childish way and feels the need of becoming mature in treating sin and how to confess their sins. The former focuses on sin while the latter focuses on sinfulness dealing sin in a mature way. He even states that the former practice is self centered, law oriented and individualistic. He adds that «The former is a laundry list type of recitation of sins as the matter of confession which reduces the complexities of morality to the simplicities of a list of isolated, individual acts of commission or omission. It also reflects a highly individualized notion of

sin. Sinful actions are not only isolated from the overall pattern of our lives, but also from the multiple relationships that make up our lives... we use the sacrament of reconciliation primarily as a private shedding process, and gave little attention to the moral life as a process of on going conversion or to the Church as a community of reconciliation.»⁷

It must be noted that R. Gula is not against the practice of confession. He is more concerned in changing the way a person does his confession. As Walter Woods claims in his book review, «that problems could arise if certain passages in the book are not read in light of contemplating statements in other places or against a context that may not be evident to every reader.»⁸ If ever R. Gula gives his comments on the practice of private confession, it is because he feels that the way a person confesses his sins lacks the essence of responsibility. For him, the old practice is more of being mechanical rather than accepting his sinfulness.

R. Gula is also so much concerned with the communal dimension of the Sacrament. He gives comment on the limitation on implementing the communal aspect of the sacrament. Pedrizetti gives comment that R. Gula «manifests his bias in favor of the communitarian aspect of reconciliation, and struggles valiantly to reconcile his own quite legitimate view with the form of current allowed practice.»⁹

1.3. *Theological Analysis of the Manual Penance the Once and Future Sacrament*

The presentation of the sacrament in the manual of L. Mick is so concise but theologically full of meaning. He expresses his desire of a deeper understanding of the sacrament to include his willingness to return to the root of the celebration where there is a clear community sense and can really experience a personal conversion. Communal celebration and personal conversion are his focus in presenting the sacrament of reconciliation.

Like M. Hellwig and R. Gula, he also feels the need of a penitent to experience real conversion that manifests in external life of the penitent. But unlike M. Hellwig who questions the efficacy of the sacrament and gives comment on the celebration, L. Mick suggests a non-sacramental celebration that will promote conversion before the celebration of the sacrament. He is very enthusiastic in bringing back the order of penitents where each penitent has

to undergo a process of conversion before he receives the sacrament. The proposal of L. Mick about the order of the penitent is the answer of what M. Hellwig is looking as regards the external effects of the sacrament.

His model of understanding in presenting the Order of penitents is very significant in revitalizing the sacrament. The celebration would be more meaningful, and it would answer what K. Osborne claims that evangelization and preaching are the main work of the minister.

His basis on a fruitful celebration of the order of penitents is the success of the present program of RCIA. Kurt Stasiak affirms this observation in saying that «L. Mick is very positive that the Order of Penitents will gain a similar mutual benefit like that of the RCIA because regular witness to all Christians' need for constant conversion.»¹⁰ But his suggestion needs a deeper reflection and study.

It is observed that L. Mick wants to bring back what is forgotten while maintaining to be faithful to the teaching of the Church. He promotes communal celebration without criticizing the personal and individual celebrations that happened in the past. In spite of encouraging and affirming the need of a communal celebration he also asserts that it is the most personal sacrament and the personal dimension must not be sacrificed.

In proving the need of the penitent to approach the minister, he gives emphasis on the role of the minister as a representative of the Church. Not only that, L. Mick even mentions that the priest is primarily a representative of the whole community and secondarily the representative of God.»¹¹ So the previous common question why is there a need to confess to the priest if I can confess directly to God is responded in a different context, that is, because sin also ruptures with the Church and there is a need to reconcile with the Church. But the Magisterium and the teaching of the Church insists that in the sacrament, the minister is first and foremost a representative of God. He is chosen to become the minister of the forgiveness of sins because he does the authority and power that God has given to Him. Forgiveness of sin is the reason why man is reconciled with God.

The changes of emphasis are very visible in the manual of L. Mick. One important consideration in his presentation of the shift of emphasis is his claim that the three acts have always been present in the celebration of the sacrament since the early Church until the present time. Only that they differ in their order. First, it was confession-penance-absolution, then it became confession-absolution-penance, absolution-penance-confession. This claim is

in contrary to that of the claim of others who believe that confession does not exist in the past, making it as something not important.

His interpretation of the changes and development of the sacrament is very positive. While others try to understand the changes negatively, and consider it without any continuity, his interpretation is that it has a continuity and that the elements are present only that the way it is celebrated changes. He even affirms that all of the three acts of the penitent are essential in the celebration of the sacrament. He states that one can celebrate the sacrament well when he has a careful attention to the three elements and make them necessary rather than reducing the sacrament to a single act.

1.4. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* Reconciliation and Justification

Of all the authors, K. Osborne is the one who gives much importance on Christology and Ecclesiology in the sacrament of reconciliation. For him, the sacrament can only be understood when it is connected to the ministry of reconciliation in the life of Christ. Christ is the foundation and the source of the sacrament, not anymore associated with grace, but with Christ himself. It is not just forgiveness of sins, but more of bringing back the relationship with Christ.

He even makes a schema of the concept of reconciliation. The foundation of all is Christ as the primordial sacrament of reconciliation, then the church as the basic sacrament of reconciliation. Only in the third phase is the specific sacrament given emphasis. His main concern is to understand the sacrament of reconciliation in a wider sense. He tries to promote the understanding of the Church as a basic sacrament of reconciliation and the existence of the different moments of reconciliation. This wider understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation is present in the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II. He even mentions the task of the Church to be faithful in performing the mission entrusted to her in making reconciliation available to all.

The diagram mentioned by K. Osborne regarding the connection of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to the ministry of reconciliation of the Church is being misinterpreted. The Sacrament of Reconciliation becomes one of the expression in fulfilling the sacramentality the Church. Since it is just considered one of the expressions, then one can conclude that the way it is celebrated can be altered including the essential parts of the sacrament. In his

presentation, it is observed that he is not convinced with the statement of the Church that the essential parts are *Iure Divino*. Worst is, he even questions the foundation of the institution of the sacrament. He cites some of the biblical scholars who claim that the biblical passage does not refer to the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself but to the mission of the church towards reconciliation. He even claims that the mission is given to all and not just to the ordained. His assertion that the biblical passages refer to the general mission of the Church supports his other claim that the celebration of the sacrament is merely an initiative of the Church to respond to the general task given to her by Christ.

But in contrast to what K. Osborne has presented, the Church and the magisterium are very firm and consistent in their stand that the passages refer to the specific sacrament of Reconciliation that is concerned in forgiving grave sins. The mission of reconciliation is truly given to all the faithful, but this mission refers not to become ministers of the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation but to become instruments in the evangelization and conversion of the people.

It appears that K. Osborne is not able to distinguish the two missions of reconciliation, that is reconciliation as a ministry, and as a sacrament. They are two distinct reconciliations that must not be confused with one another. The ministry of reconciliation is a task given to the whole Church and Christ wants the Church to bring his mission of bringing this task to the whole world. There is another reconciliation in the Church that Christ has founded, that is the specific sacrament of Reconciliation intended for the forgiveness of sins. These two tasks of reconciliation must not be equated to each other.

Aside from the issue regarding the institution, K. Osborne is very concerned in bringing back the theology of justification in the sacrament of reconciliation. K. Osborne is not satisfied with the way the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council, the newly revised rites of penance and the formulation of the Canon law give attention to the theology of justification in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He recommends a clear connection of the two that for him is so important to understand the sacrament of reconciliation. K. Osborne is right in his observation that the Church tries to avoid talking about justification and punishment because of the shift of emphasis from justice, punishment and deliverance, to love, forgiveness and relationship. The main possibility why some of the authors and theologians rarely mention about this reality is because of the need to promote the present emphasis of love and reconciliation. No matter what emphasis on the sacrament is given

in the contemporary period, it is unreasonable to disregard the reality about justification.

One thing that is very noticeable in the manual of K. Osborne is his presentation of the unresolved issues. It seems that he has a hard time reconciling some obvious interrelated aspects in the doctrine of the Church. One of these is the relation between God's absolute gratuity and complete adequacy of the salvation of Christ, and the necessity of the essential acts of the penitent. He mentions this issue many times throughout the manual. He questions why is it necessary for a man to do something in order for him to receive the grace of God that is freely given. Does it mean that we need to win the grace of God, that is why the acts of the penitent matter? But it is clear in the teaching of the Church that the necessity of the response of the penitent does not oppose the doctrine of the absolute gratuity and complete adequacy of the saving act of God. Rather the necessity of the act of confession hinders the desire of K. Osborne to make the celebration purely communal.

The claim of K. Osborne is also a call to balance the emphasis in the sacrament. He presents this issue on the absolute gratuity of God's grace because of the previous too much emphasis on the acts of the penitent, as if the act of man is more important than the action and grace of God. Carl Peter who makes a book review on the work of K. Osborne, states that «K. Osborne is repeatedly concerned as to whether human works involved in the process of ecclesial reconciliation can be open to Pelagian interpretation, and the practice of the rite that involves demanding the penitent to do something warrant the suspicion of possible Pelagianism.»¹² The emphasis given by K. Osborne on justification is an invitation to make clear the importance of the absolute gratuity and complete adequacy on the sacrament of Reconciliation.

His other claim is the condition implemented by the Church in availing the third rites of Penance with general absolution. He is in favor of making the general absolution an ordinary celebration. One of the main themes that he tries to verify is the three seemingly contradictory ways of the forgiveness of sin namely, contrition, integrated confession with individual absolution, and general absolution. He states that the Church teaches that the ordinary way of the forgiveness of sin is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but it also accepts that perfect contrition itself is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins, and general absolution is also a means of the forgiveness of sins.

Some of them are obvious questions. The Church has already distinguished them and that they do not oppose each other. Even Jose Millas in his

book review, states that «he is not convinced with how K. Osborne resolves some of the issues of the sacrament most especially the issue on general absolution.¹³

But his presentation about the unresolved issues somehow gives us an idea of the present misunderstanding of the sacrament of reconciliation. It also helps the present study identify some of the reasons of the crisis and gives enlightenment on how to deal with the theology of the sacrament. J. Dallen, who happens to write a book review on the work of K. Osborne, states that «K. Osborne's originality in recognizing the current areas of controversy regarding the sacrament of reconciliation are clear signs that we have still not fully accepted the theology of justification.»¹⁴

It is also an interesting observation that the protestant view on the sacrament has already influenced some of the Catholic authors. According to Dónal Cuilleainain, «Luther was uneasy with the idea that forgiveness was in any way dependent on the penitent's effort for these. His view blurred the reality of the gratuitousness of forgiveness»¹⁵

1.5. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* The Sacrament of Reconciliation: A Theological and Canonical Treatise

Of all the authors, it is A. Cuschieri who least mentions the present crisis of the sacrament. He neither mentions the connection of the sacrament to the sacramentality of the ministry of Christ and the Church. His focus is more on explaining the sacrament in the light of theology and the Code of Canon Law.

Nevertheless, the work of A. Cuschieri is of great significance since it gives balance to the claim of some of the selected authors. While there are authors like K. Osborne and J. Dallen who question the necessity of some requirements and conditions in the celebration of the third rite, A Cuschieri defends and explains the conditions by citing and giving commentary on the Canon of the sacraments.

His presentation on the theology of sin gives clarification to the present study that the trend in the contemporary period is the understanding of sin as a rupture of relationship. Although he does not implicitly mention that sin is a rupture of one's relationship with God, with others, with the Church and with himself, he presents how sin affects his relationship with each one of them.

He also gives emphasis on the need of the participation of the faithful in the celebration of the sacrament. But unlike the other authors, he does not go beyond the teachings and doctrines of the Church. He knows his limitation and is aware of what the law says.

A. Cuschieri mentions about the existing issues on the minister of the sacrament, and he uses the Canonical treatise and gives some commentaries on it why the ordained is the only minister of the sacrament.

1.6. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance

The title of his work is very evident how he wants to promote the participation of the faithful in the celebration. Although he does not mention about a claim that only the ordained are the minister of the sacrament, his presentation shows how he entertains that the minister is given to the Church in general. He also shows how he is in favor on implementing and enhancing the celebration of the third rite. «He expresses severe criticism of the Vatican II restrictions on general absolution by claiming that the third rite more thoroughly expresses the council's guiding principles for reform than do the other rites.»¹⁶

Even in his book review on the work of D. Coffey, he mentions that they have different ways of seeing the sacrament of Penance and criticizes the claim of D. Coffey on the essentiality of the acts of the penitent and confession as an indispensable part of the sacrament. He states «that with the claim of establishing contrition, confession, absolution and satisfaction as necessary and indispensable parts of the sacrament *Iure Divino*, there is no possibility of resuming lay confession. A lay person could never be authorized to absolve; confession remains the point of reference for any possible form of the sacrament; confession of grave sin can never be optional.»¹⁷

His presentation of the history especially the revision of the rites, is very detailed. «He has done an excellent job in piecing together a general picture of the deliberation leading up to the promulgation of the definitive rites. Each of the major periods of penance and reconciliation is presented in a thorough and systematic passion.»¹⁸ But he is not contented with the outcome of the rite especially that he is aware of the tensions while making the rites. According to Cooke, «J. Dallen, appraises positively the achievement and directions of the

revised rites but he is not uncritically enthusiastic. For one thing he indicates that the new reconciliation ritual does not match the revised ritual for adult initiation in demanding a more adequate ecclesiology, and restructured Christian communities.»¹⁹

He gives weight on the shift of emphasis of the theology of the sacrament as the reason of continuous changing and development of the rites. He even claims that the Church responds to the need of reconciliation and the rites continue to change. This is the same observation of Cooke and Mannion on how J. Dallen understands the development of the sacrament.²⁰

J. Dallen is also concerned not just on reconciliation within the sacrament, but also reconciliation in the life and experience of the faithful. «J. Dallen superimposes a theological model that views sacramental rites essentially as the ritualization of processes of conversion and reconciliation largely generated and actualized in nonritual contexts.»²¹ He considers conversion as a process, but in giving too much emphasis on the experiential conversion and reconciliation, he fails to see some essential elements of the celebration of the sacrament.

1.7. *Theological Analysis of the Manual A Time for Embracing. Reclaiming Reconciliation*

As J. Upton has presented in her introduction, she describes her work as giving first her attention to the magnitude of the problem by identifying some of its causes. From there, she evaluates the present culture in her society, and examines the historical development of the sacrament. Afterwards, she provides a theological focus to the ritual celebration of the sacrament. She is very pastoral in her approach and she bases her manual on the practical observation of the community in the society.

A total awareness of the sacrament is a challenge that the author is giving to the Church. The sacrament has a wider reality other than just saying I am sorry and receiving the absolution. For her, it is more of experiencing a true conversion.

Her observation about how the culture affects the sacrament of reconciliation is something that must be given importance. The problem that J. Upton raises is the attitude of the people in diverting themselves to other fields rather than to the sacrament. As she states, psychologists and oth-

er fields substitute the essence of the sacrament. While the penitents are looking for reconciliation, they find it in another field where it also offers healing and consolation but the spiritual and theological aspect is missing. While these fields satisfy them emotionally, it starts the decline of the spiritual concern of the people. With this experience, how can the faithful recognize the importance of the sacrament without confusing it with any of the various forms of psychological therapy? John Paul II offers a very concrete answer to this confusion. He states «the Sacrament can be recognized by bringing the penitent into contact with the merciful heart of God through the friendly face of a brother.»²² The solution is to let the person aware, that the sacrament is more than psychological or emotional aspect, but it deals more on one's relationship with God.

1.8. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Sin is an important theme in the manual of D. Coffey. He considers sin as one of the major causes of the crisis of sin. Aside from presenting sin as primarily an offense against God, he states that there really exists a distinction of sin especially the distinction of grave and non grave sins. He mentions that although the term mortal and venial sins are already out of the context, the existence of the different gravity of sin can never be neglected since it is something founded in the scripture. The acknowledgment of the distinction of the seriousness of sin and the way it has to be dealt with is of importance in the study most especially that some of the authors do not distinguish the sacrament from other means of reconciliation. D. Coffey reaffirms that it is primarily the grave sin that the sacrament is concerned of.

Like K. Osborne, D. Coffey also discusses the Christological and ecclesiological aspect of the sacrament by presenting reconciliation and conversion in the ministry and life of Jesus while insisting that in the history there is always an awareness of the social dimension of sin. But unlike the presentation of K. Osborne, he never considers the sacrament of Reconciliation as one of the expressions of the ministry of reconciliation of the Church. He even gives importance on the acts of the penitent. He states that they are non negotiable essential elements of the sacrament. Contrary to those who want to make the third rite an ordinary rite without any conditions, D. Coffey firmly insists that the three acts must be present in any sacramental celebration.

In his discussion on the rites of penance, he gives the details of the celebration and gives the advantages and disadvantages of the different rites. While some of the authors try to praise the third rite as a celebration that really promotes the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament, D. Coffey on the other hand presents the anomalies, exhibited by the rites. «They are the practice of assigning the same work of penance to all the penitent without taking into consideration the different degrees of the sins that each one of them has committed. In the third rite it is impossible for the minister to exercise the discretionary judgment enjoined in the gospel passage John 20:23. The other anomaly is that although the absolution is intended for the individual sins, it is a group as such that is addressed by the word of forgiveness rather than each person individually.»²³

With the increasing practice of the third rite, D. Coffey states that there is nothing wrong with its increasing celebration because even the regular celebration of the third rite will promote private confession.

1.9. *Theological Analysis of the Manual* The Untapped Power of the Sacrament of Penance: A Priest's View

Amidst the crisis of the sacrament of reconciliation and different questions regarding the way the sacrament has to be celebrated, despite criticism given to the previous practice of the sacrament, and the claim of some regarding the biblical foundation of the sacrament, here is an author who is firm in his stand that it is the sacrament of confession that man needs, not only before but even during the present time. He even starts his presentation in quoting the conversation of a priest and a lay person who has a desire to go back to the Church. The latter is asking what is he going to do if he wants to go back to the Church. The priest simply replied for him to avail of the sacrament of reconciliation and confess.

The answer of the priest being quoted by C. Walsh is something that one has to reflect. This is the reality that many are not aware of in taking into consideration the place of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Church. The Church may be offering many things to bring back man closer to God, but one necessary thing that he must do for his conversion, is to ask pardon from God and be forgiven. There is only one ordinary way of doing it, the way God has intended it to be and that is through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

One has to remember, that it is sin that separates man and leads him far from God. Therefore if we want to go back to God, then we have to ask for forgiveness from God. In fact, that is the first thing that the prodigal son has done. After realizing his mistake and his situation, he went back to his father and the words that he uttered, was to say sorry for what he has done. God also offers us means so that a person who commits grave sin after being baptized, has still a chance to go back and be forgiven.

It must be noted that the Church feels the need to understand the celebration and essence of the sacrament. Misunderstanding of the essence of the sacrament is one of the major reasons of the crisis. Thus, it is through the manual of C. Walsh that the thesis comes out with an idea of the necessity to balance every dimension of the sacrament.

For centuries already, the sacrament has been the victim of dichotomizing the parts and insisting in what part or act is the most important. C. Walsh has presented the three models of the sacrament, that of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. He affirms that a sacrament is not just an experience of forgiveness, neither solely a matter of healing nor it deals with reconciliation alone. But it is an experience of the three models. He states that to accomplish the goal of experiencing the sacrament, they need to personally encounter the Lord's healing, forgiving and reconciling grace. He even continues that «it is personal but also relational and dialogical, healing and at the same time consoling»²⁴ C. Walsh has a point in saying that the sacrament has been the victim of dichotomizing the parts, but it is not only the essential parts that have been dichotomized but also other dimensions of the sacrament to the extent of denying or rejecting the opposite. With his aspiration to avoid dichotomizing but to balance the three models of the sacrament, the present study feels the need to balance not just the three models but also the different dimension of the sacraments.

It is the right time to stop dichotomizing the parts of the sacrament. There is nothing wrong if ever one tries to distinguish one after another, or to give emphasis to one aspect, but not to the extent of sacrificing other essential parts. There is a need to see other aspects not as a hindrance but a complementing aspect in making the sacrament more mature and complete.

As regards the reasons of the crisis of the sacrament, he focuses more on the pastoral questions and issues rather than a theological one. He is concerned with the questions and observations of the penitent which includes the question on the necessity of the sacrament and why not directly to God. He

even rarely discusses about the present concern on the newly revised rites of the sacrament and the claim of making the third rite an ordinary celebration of the sacrament without any conditions nor the issue about the institution. For him it is not a question if it is instituted by Christ or not, because it is a conviction. He is more concerned on the need to vitalize it.

Although in his manual, he has mentioned about the nature of sin, but it is less exhaustive compared to others. Even his presentation on the role of the priest is more of a spiritual concern rather than something theological. Although his concern is to explain the pastoral question of the faithful, his presentation is theologically founded and very faithful to the doctrine of the Church.

He is one of the authors who is really concerned of bringing back the previous practice of individual confession. He even encourages and explains the wisdom of the frequent confession that in the manual of K. Osborne is put into question. For him, it is only possible for the Church to enhance the integral confession if all of them are convinced of the importance of its. But with the situation today that even the different authors and theologians have different ways of seeing the rites and celebration of the sacrament in spite of a clear stand of the magisterium and the doctrine of the Church, then it is still difficult to achieve the desire of bringing back the faithful to the practice of the integral confession.

2. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE ISSUES AROUND SIN

Many articles in the contemporary period have mentioned about the loss of the sense of sin as a main factor of the crisis of the sacrament. But looking at the presentation of the authors, it is not just the problem of the loss of the sense of sin that needs to be dealt with. More so on the existence of the personal sin, personal responsibility, and the attitude of the contemporary writers on the previous emphasis given to the law.

In reference to this, the study divides this part into three, namely; first, how the loss of the sense of sin affects the sacrament and what remedies can be offered; second is the need to balance personal and social sin; and third is a call to transcend the understanding of sin from transgression of the law to ruptures of relationship, rather than criticizing the previous practice of the Church and rejecting the importance of the law in the sacrament.

2.1. *Loss of the Sense of Sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation*

The issue on the loss of the sense of sin is something that must be given attention. «The restoration of a proper sense of sin is the first way of facing the grave spiritual crisis looming over man today.»²⁵ Only in having a sense of sin is it possible to bring man to God.

John Paul II repeatedly mentions the issue on the loss of the sense of sin. This is the same problem being asserted by Benedict XVI.²⁶ One can even say that this is the greatest success of the devil, to convince people that there is no such thing as sin. The loss of the sense of sin is even a worst reality than any act of sin such as war, abortion and any grave crime. With the loss of the sense of sin, man starts to believe that all his actions are permissible. He never hesitates to do anything that pleases him no matter how sinful it is. He becomes free in doing any sinful act. This was the strategy of the devil in tempting Adam and Eve. He convinced them that there is nothing wrong in eating the forbidden fruit. The phrase «*it is just all right, there is nothing wrong, you can do it*», is the deception of the devil to justify the sinful act of man. When the world has this kind of mentality, then it is the start of division, conflicts, a world very far from God, and the impossibility to bring back man to God.

As a result of the loss of the sense of sin, obviously the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes insignificant. They do not feel the need to go to confession nor ask for forgiveness of sins. R. Gula states that the effect of the loss of the sense of sins «reflects the effects of the wave of a popular no fault theology which has made confession a meaningless ritual, since it has done away with moral guilt and unaware of sin.»²⁷ Consequently, man fails to value and appreciate the mercy and love of God, nor understand the meaning of the saving act of God, how much more to appreciate the beauty of the sacrament that Christ has instituted.

If the loss of the sense of sin hinders a person to see and feel the need of the mercy of God, then it is in awareness of his sinfulness that one can appreciate the mercy and love of God. As a result, the Church feels the urgency of the need to bring back the sense of sin. It is the primary step in going back to God.²⁸ As only a patient who admits that he is sick can he start taking his medications, only a sinner who admits his sinfulness that conversion is possible. «Only if one admits he is a sinner can he be pardoned. Only by recognizing sin can he become more open and receptive to the power of

God.»²⁹ And only in believing that sin exists, that one can recognize sin in his life.

What are the important means to overcome this loss of the sense of sin? There are lots of things to be done to bring back the sense of sin. First and foremost is the need of evangelization and catechism on the existence and theology of sin. It is observed that few priests already talk about sin in their homilies, in their catechism. If the priests fail to inform the faithful regarding the existence of sin, then how is it possible that man realizes their sinfulness? It may be true that people feel uneasy whenever they talk about sin and sinfulness, but it must not happen to the priests.

The minister must untiringly preach about sin, repentance and conversion no matter if people stop talking about it. «Perhaps some priest fear being considered negative if they preach on sin. Do doctors have such a complex? Are they afraid they will be considered negative if they warn people about the disease? They are held back by no hesitations, because they know that diseases do exist, and they also know that they have the cure. They also know that ignorance can stop people coming to be cured. We need to preach repentance even when we do not feel like preaching it because the atmosphere seems unfavorable to receiving the message of penance.»³⁰

While the physician never hesitates to tell his patients or others about the existence of a disease, in no way also must the ministers hesitate to talk about sin and sinfulness. According to John Paul II, one of the main solutions to promote penance and reconciliation is catechesis. He even challenges every individual to acknowledge the existence of sins in their lives so that repentance and confession becomes possible.³¹

Second is the need to emphasize the need of proclaiming the love of God. The preaching of the existence of sin must not be done independently and in isolation. Preaching the existence of sin is preaching the mercy and greatness of the love of God. Making the people aware of sin, is letting the people realize that they need the mercy and love of God. Therefore, the Church and the society must not be afraid or feel awkward in talking about sin, because «the affirmation of the reality of sin is a proclamation of the grace that overflows from the greatness of God.»³²

As has been stated in the first Chapter, John Paul II, claims that the loss of the sense of sin is connected to the loss of the sense of God. The restoration of the sense of sin must go hand on hand with the restoration of the sense of God in a society. «If we have to reach a definition of sin, we can find its mean-

ing only in the love God has for us and the person of Christ through whom this love is manifest. Love alone can give us the sense of sin. We will believe in sin just as soon as we come to believe in love and that love is a person.»³³ Realizing and feeling the unconditional love of God, will lead man to feel his unworthiness and become conscious of his sinfulness.

Third, evangelization must not only focus on bringing back the sense of sin but also letting the person aware of the reality of the life of a sinner. The modern world may think that life far away from God is a life they are looking for. In reality it is the opposite. «Sacred Scripture stresses the terrible reality of sin. Sin is compared to death, leprosy, exile, poverty, hunger and slavery: all these images portray the particular effects that sin can produce in a person's life.»³⁴

The story of the prodigal son gives us an idea how a sinful person lives. The prodigal son enjoyed everything that he received while he continued to live independent from his father. But it did not last long. He ended up living a degrading life. His friends who celebrated with him left him, to the extent that he ate what the swine ate. The parable also portrayed that the life of a servant was much better than a sinner. The son even wished to be treated as a servant who was far better off than his present condition.

This proves that the awareness of the consequence and punishment is also significant in the conversion of the sinners. K. Osborne insists of bringing back the theology of justification and it can never be separated from the theology of the sacrament. The consequence of sin is not something to be hidden but must be included in the proclamation of the love of God.

Fourth, there is a need of the evangelization of the culture. «The main cause of the crisis is a major cultural shift presently occurring in society at large, for which the Church needs to rethink its strategy on evangelization.»³⁵ While there are societies who insist in making some immoralities to be legalized, the Church must also untiringly preach the truth about the immoralities of the act.

Lastly, all of this would not be possible without the grace of God. It must be noted that conversion and reconciliation are primarily acts of God. It is impossible for us to acknowledge our sinfulness without God touching our lives. The only hope for them is the guidance of the Holy Spirit who continues to touch the life of the people and that they may open their hearts to the reality of the world. Through opening to the power of the Holy Spirit, they may be able to listen to their own conscience.

2.2. *Personal Sin and Social Sin*

The previous problem that the Church experienced was the insufficient knowledge of the reality of sin. Man focused on his personal sin, and on how he violated the law. They gave less importance on the social dimension of sin. Some of the authors even criticize the previous practice of the sacrament as very individualistic, without communal dimension.³⁶ With the radical emphasis of some of the authors on the social sin, majority of the faithful do not anymore consider previous sin as such. It appears that while considering the previous sin as insufficient, the focus on the social sin blinds man to see the importance of the previous understanding of sin.

The emphasis given to the social sin is supposed to bring more people to confession, because sin has widened its horizon. But what happened, instead of bringing more people to avail of the sacrament, the faithful are no longer aware of the sins they have to confess.

How can one reconcile this reality? During the time that sin is just limited to sin of commission and individual sin, people are aware that they are sinners. Even those who are pious feel the need to go to confession to ask for forgiveness. But when the church has widened the horizon, that sin is both commission and omission, both individual and social, the sacrament is being ignored. «Sincere Christians are already seldom convinced that they are constantly living in a state of serious sin.»³⁷

There are two causes that bring a negative aspect on the shift of emphasis basing on the presentation of the authors. First, the shift of emphasis hides the previous emphasis of individual sin. Consequently, it makes the individual sin unrecognizable, making social sin as the sole sin. This makes the faithful unaware of the sin he has to confess. A person focuses more on sin that affects his relationship with others rather than the private and personal sin. If the previous individual sin and the long lists of the sins committed blind man to see the existence of the social sin, the same mistake is again committed. The shift of emphasis leads to disregard the previous sin and consider the new emphasis as the only sin.

Social dimension of sin becomes more important to the extent of setting aside the sins emphasized before. «Undoubtedly, some sort of theological support has been created for this by writers who practically reduce sin to defects of group, class or structures, group exploitation, political corruption or oppression.»³⁸ «Some people no longer confess to missing mass, premarital sex or masturbation. They confess selfishness, jealousy, and prejudice.»³⁹

Missing Sunday masses without any grave reason, premarital sex, and others are still considered sin and will always be sinful. Sin does not change, but one's attitude towards sin changes. Sin is always a sin but people do not already consider them as such. «Those who have come to see sin only in terms of large social realities, such as racial exploitation, sexual discrimination, national colonialism, or world peace, have found the private rite quite beside the point»⁴⁰

Secondly, the emphasis of the social sin is not coupled with the emphasis of responsibility. Awareness of the existence of the social sin without accepting the responsibility does not solve the existing issues. John Paul II has emphasized this in his Apostolic Exhortation. No matter how social sin is, it is still personal and each is responsible of it.⁴¹ Sin must not be considered as cumulative. Though, we cannot deny that there exists a collective sin, which refers to sin committed by a group of person, collective sins do not lessen the accountability and guilt of an individual. He is still guilty of that sin.

The problem that the world is experiencing nowadays is the loss of the sense of responsibility that contributes to the loss of the sense of sin. The parable of the *Rich man and Lazarus* is a good illustration to describe the issue of the sense of sin. The rich man follows and fulfills the commandments. He does not kill, does not steal, and so on. With that he is convinced that he has not harmed others. But he forgets that it is not just in not sinning, but more so, in not doing his obligation to others.

It is the same mistake and reality that is happening today. Many believe that as long as they do not do any direct harm to others, then he does not commit sin. They never realize that failing to do his obligation also harms other people. There are many corruptions happening, poverty, and hunger but nobody knows who is to be blamed. They are aware of the sins, but they are not of their responsibilities and obligations. With this reality, nobody knows who is to be blamed of the social crimes.

In reference to this, the study feels the need to balance the personal and social sins and couple it with consciousness of responsibility. While it is true that «Sin itself cannot be properly understood if it is viewed in a purely private way, forgetting that it inevitably affects the entire community and lowers the level of holiness within it»,⁴² sin can also never be grasped in its totality if it is viewed in a purely social context. It is then erroneous to ignore the previous understanding of sin and criticize it as individualistic and does not promote social awareness of sin. Rather, the theology has to integrate it to the new emphasis of sin.

If ever the shift may cause the decline of availing of the sacrament, it does not mean that the shift is something negative. Only that the shift has been misunderstood and was not directed well that it appears to be denying the existence of sin. «Some of the reasons being observed as the causes of the rapid decline are the shift in catholic sense of sin considered as a denial of the very reality of sin. But the shift is a movement, away from an over emphasis on sexual morality above all other moral issues, from an understanding of sin as a breaking of an absolute law. And from a purely private morality that tended to ignore areas like racism and economic injustice.»⁴³

Therefore, to give emphasis on the reality of social sin is not something erroneous. On the other hand, this presentation of the social sin must always be coupled with responsibility and let the person see how he collaborates to the existing social sin. What happens is, people become aware of the social evil happening but almost all the people feel that they are victims of this social evil and exploitation. They become aware of the social sin, but they are not aware who are responsible for this, and each tries to wash his hands to this reality, pointing their hands to others and claiming that he is a victim. It is a reality that is not new to us. It is the same attitude of the first parents, pointing each other and claiming that he or she is a victim. The consequence is the loss of the sense of sin. «If we teach people to feel victimized and exploited, if we tell them they are the sufferers of wrong without reminding them that they are also doers of wrong, which we all are, then we are encouraging them to fall into self pity that almost always leads to self righteousness which is probably the greatest block to grace and salvation.»⁴⁴

2.3. The Call to Transcend the Understanding of Sin from Transgression of Law to Ruptures of Relationship

The third major observation of the authors regarding the concept of sin is the attitude of making sin as primarily a transgression of law. Majority of the authors radically criticize the excessive emphasis on the law and even consider it as misleading. In fact, there is no author who mentions the significance of the law in the understanding of the concept of sin. On the other hand, it is not fair and reasonable to disregard the importance of the commandments in understanding the concept of sin.

It is observed that the sacrament goes with the meaning of sin. «Sacrament as a response takes its proper shape in accordance with the way sin is

experienced. In the first five centuries of the church, serious sin was experienced as excommunication, so the proper response was re-communion or reconciliation with the Church. In the second phase, sin was experienced in some form as code violation, the sacramental form took new shape and responded accordingly. In our own day, when the experience of sin seems to be shifting away from code violation to a less neatly defined sense of sinfulness, one must ask what form will properly address this experience with the healing power of the Church.»⁴⁵ Since there is a tendency to disregard the concept of sin as a violation of the law, then the previous practice of the sacrament with judicial dimension is also ignored.

It is important to always consider that law is not something that disrupts our understanding of sin. The law is coming from God. The commandments represent the will of God and never can the Divine law oppose the understanding of the sacrament or of the mercy of God. The law of God does not represent an external will to man. It is the same law that God has put in the heart of man, an echo or an expression of the divine wisdom and the divine will.

Although God has placed in us a law that we ought to follow, there are times when we cannot grasp it because of lack of formation of the conscience. But still, this law is still manifested outside of man. «Eternal law is made manifest not only through the mediation of conscience but also through the revealed truth proclaimed by the church and accepted in faith.»⁴⁶ It manifested in the Ten Commandments given by God. But they are there to guide and to give order. «The laws of God and his Church are for our protection, based as they are on genuine love and a knowledge of human nature.»⁴⁷

Following the commandments of God is living a life closer to God. It is a life that leads us to nurture our relationship with God and His people, a way of fulfilling the covenantal love that man has with God. «It indicates the condition of a free life from the slavery of sin.»⁴⁸ Therefore, to claim that sin is a violation of the law, is a correct understanding. It is a culpable act of disobedience to God's law. «No one is trying to do away with laws. We know that laws will always be necessary to help us live together well.»⁴⁹ There is just a need to transcend from it.

In the gospel passage, when the rich man asked Christ, 'Master, what should I do to gain eternal life?' Christ explicitly replied, 'follow the commandments.' This is to show that law is not something bad, nor something that contradicts relationship. Fulfilling the commandment is something that

leads us to God. Christ even proves that He is not against the law. «I have come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.»⁵⁰

Law is very necessary in guiding the person to fight and avoid committing sin. It is even considered by some as «the most familiar weapon in the war against sin. We make such law to teach safety, self protection, and virtue, to provide a road map for the development of character.»⁵¹ No doubt Christ asks the young man to follow the commandment if he desires to follow him because it is the initial step of setting his direction to Christ.

The Church invites the faithful to transcend their understanding of the law and of sin. It is to understand sin as not a violation of the law per se, but rather the law is just an expression of a much wider reality, the reality of relationship. It is an invitation to go deeper than just identifying sin in relation to the commandments. One has to know why it is a sin and why it is forbidden. «A sin is a sin not just because God said so, but because it is bad for human growth and happiness or has negative effects on the society at large. To sin is to harm oneself and other people.»⁵²

The passage in the book of Deuteronomy gives us a clear idea on how to understand the law. «For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.»⁵³ It is first and foremost related to the love of the Lord. Keeping the commandment guides us towards loving him and walking in his way.

When God accuses them with the sin that they have committed, it is not because they have violated the law, but they have ruptured their covenantal love and their faithfulness with God. «The Israel broke the bond of love which the law was an external expression. The law was not to be the final object of Israel's fidelity, but God. Sin in the bible is not breaking a law; sin is against people not against concept or structure.»⁵⁴

The correct attitude of the law helps us to see the real nature of sin to appreciate the sacrament as restoring the relationship of God rather than considered as a courtroom where man will be judged with what he has done. «It is not just a matter of following the law without understanding why it is forbidden or allowed, rather more of seeking to understand why it is right and why it is wrong.»⁵⁵

The resolution of the present misunderstanding of the law is not to disregard the law, nor consider it as having nothing to do with relationship and

with the violation caused by sin. Law plays an important role in determining if one commits sin or not. What is needed is «obedience to law must be based upon respect for values and animated by love for person in the same way, the love of God and not the fear of punishment or sin should be the motive for the moral life and the effort that accompanies it.»⁵⁶ While the Church tries to enhance the faithful in being faithful in following the law, it must always be coupled with a full awareness of the essence of the law with emphasis on relationship and love.

One consideration that needs to be given attention here is that law comes from God. «If we believe law to be a gift from God and has the power to order the very core of our personal and social being, we will find law beautiful.»⁵⁷ To consider it as a law of love, is to become aware that law is there neither a restriction, nor to make him suffer and make his life miserable and difficult to live with, but rather a guide on how he ought to live his life. «Sin is therefore disobedience to God's commandments which really are divine invitations to meet God's love with an openhearted return of love»⁵⁸ If man considers law as a gift from God, then those who are in authority have to make the law of God as the root of every specific laws, an expression of the eternal law of God which is based on love. It should not contradict, but rather promote relationship.

II. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE ISSUES OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The different authors have presented some of the issues of the crisis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. K. Osborne considers some of them as unresolved issues. It is evident that the different authors have some claims that oppose each other. We cannot deny that the different opinions of the authors and even by some theologians affect the crisis and confusion that the sacrament is experiencing.

The present chapter gives a theological analysis on the remaining issues presented in the previous chapters. The presentation of the essential conviction in chapter eight clarifies some of the questions and issues regarding the crisis of the sacrament. This last chapter focuses more on the issues on the celebration of the sacrament, specifically on the third rite and

the act of confession; the pastoral aspect of the sacrament, and lastly, the need to balance some of the new emphasis that affects the celebration of the sacrament.

1. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

The Church has offered three forms of celebrating the the sacrament. Although the new rite is composed of three forms, only two of them are celebrated without a condition. If ever only the two of the three rites are called ordinary and are celebrated without any conditions it is because it comprises all the elements in a normal order and they are performed within the celebration of the rites. The other rite is extra ordinary not because confession is missing, other wise it will never be called a rite of sacrament of reconciliation since in the celebration confession is an integral part. It is extraordinary because confession is received after awhile.

The first form is the ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament wherein each penitent has to approach the priest in availing of the sacrament of Reconciliation individually without any communal celebration. «The first form, for individual confession, has sometimes been described as being just like confession before the council. In fact, the first form is intended to be a much richer and more personal experience. This form of the rite is designed to provide the opportunity to look deeply into one's life and seek spiritual growth with the aid of a skilled confessor.»⁵⁹ In this celebration, the importance of the word of God and reflection is added and given emphasis.

The first form is more of personal dialogue, conversion and experience of the penitent. Although the whole community is not involved in this celebration, there is still a communal aspect in the first form. The priest acts as a representative of the Church and of the community.

The second rite is a celebration of many penitents gathered, and there is an individual confession. The second form somehow gives greater emphasis to the communal aspects of the sacrament. There are several penitents gathered as a community to celebrate the liturgy of the word and have examination of conscience. It is only in the later part that each one of them is going to avail of the integral confession.

Although the second rite deals on the communal aspect and the personal dimension of the sacrament, the second form does not have the luxury of time

to engage in an extensive personal dialogue because there are many penitents waiting for their turn.

The third form is celebrated with general absolution before the individual confession, but it has been severely restricted by the Vatican to emergency situations when it is not possible to offer individual reconciliation. It is celebrated just for a certain occasion and with certain restrictions. It is the most communal celebration but it lacks the personal aspect of the sacrament.

The Code of Canon Law enumerates the circumstance where the Church can use the third form of the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. «It can only be given when danger of death threatens and there is no time for the priest to hear the confession of the individual penitents and secondly if there exists a grave necessity, that is, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors available, that without fault of their own, penitents are deprived of the sacramental grace or of Holy Communion for a lengthy period of time.»⁶⁰

Availing of the third form of the sacrament does not mean that one is not already obliged for individual confession. It must be noted that «one cannot avail again the general confession and absolution if he has not yet availed of the individual confession after his prior general confession and absolution. One has to personally resolve to confess in due time each of the grave sins which cannot for the moment be confessed.»⁶¹

1.1. *Rites of Penance*

The authors give their personal perception on the criteria, bases, and reasons of the reform of the rites. J. Dallen summarizes the criteria of reform.⁶² L. Mick enumerates three important concerns of the rites,⁶³ while K. Osborne mentions other theological keys of the celebration.⁶⁴ However, K. Osborne adds a commentary regarding the lack of the issue of justification in the newly revised rite. He asserts the necessity of the discussion of justification in order to understand the sacrament of reconciliation. He states that «Many of the limitation of the rites of penance stem precisely from its lack of catechetical and theological integration into the theological aspects of justification.»⁶⁵

There are important aspects that need to be given attention regarding the presentation of the rites of penance. They are the communal dimension, the understanding of sin as reconciliation, and the need to distinguish the understanding of sacrament from celebration.

First, with the calling of the Council to make the celebration communal, the *Ordo Paenitentiae* responds to this calling by making the communal celebration visible. The rites adopt the change of emphasis of sin, giving importance on the rupture both with God and the Church. The rite has to manifest the reality that the sinner has to reconcile with God and with the Church.

The idea of sin as an offense against the Church is neither a new discovery of the Church nor a theology that arise in the Second Vatican Council. The Church is already aware of this reality that sin hurts the community of Christ. It can even be rooted in the scripture. Nevertheless the Council has asked for more emphasis of the rites on the reality of the nature of sin as against the Church and the need to reconcile with the Church. This invitation of emphasis is more of connecting the relation of the rupture with Christ and with the Church, and the simultaneous reconciliation of both. The rites give emphasis on the communal celebration and on the theology of reconciling the sinner to the Church.

Second, the present rite focuses on reconciliation. «In the revised rites of penance, the whole penitential event is structured around the central idea of reconciliation that is realized through conversion of the penitent to God in the Church, and the creative acceptance of the mercy of God realized in the ministry of the Church.»⁶⁶ Even though reconciliation and the mercy of God are the emphasis of the rites, the role of the priest as a judge is also mentioned which means that it also considers the judicial aspect of the sacrament.⁶⁷

Another important point that has to be considered is to distinguish sacrament from celebration. The sacrament is instituted by God, and as an institution, the essential elements that are included in the institution can never be altered by the Church and can never be dispensed. On the other hand, the way it is celebrated can be revised depending on how the sacrament can be manifested in the life of the Church.

The celebration is an aid to express the meaning of the sacrament and help the person dispose himself in availing of the sacrament. There are times that the reconciliatory celebration that deepens the experience of conversion is confused with the sacrament. The first confusion is substituting the sacrament with a reconciliatory act. The celebration that is preparatory in nature, becomes the source of the forgiveness of sins. «The sign that in today's tacit agreement that penitential services in common can completely, or al-

most completely replace personal confession. At this point, precisely the most personal and the most unrelinquishable act of the entire sacramental life is suppressed.»⁶⁸ Worst is, when they consider a reconciliatory act outside the sacrament as satisfactory. That is why, it must be noted that there are parts of the celebration of the sacrament that have nothing to do with forgiveness of sins, but only enhance the person towards conversion.

The other confusion is the tendency to apply the revision to the sacrament itself. While the Church can revise the way it is celebrated, the Church can never change the sacrament. But when celebration and sacrament are confused, then the tendency is to revise even the essential elements of the sacrament. When the Vatican Council encourages to revise the rites, what the Church wants to revise is the celebration but not the essence of the sacrament. The Church has no authority to change it.

In this way, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament insist that care should be taken that the faithful do not confuse these celebrations with the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. According to the congregation:

«As an aid to a more fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Penance and in the hope of fostering the spirit and virtue of penance among the faithful, the Rite of Penance includes material for 'Penitential celebrations which are described as gatherings of the people of God to hear the proclamation of God's word'. 'Care should be taken that the faithful do not confuse these celebrations with the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance', in particular, *by making clear to them that such celebrations are preparatory* in nature and do not include the sacramental forgiveness of sins.»⁶⁹

1.2. *The Question on the Third Rite*

Of the three rites, the most controversial is the third rite, namely, the reconciliation of several penitents with general confession and absolution. «It is evident that the new ritual gives a harmony and enriches the seemingly opposing reality between the private celebration and communal character. The difficulties consist in knowing if these criteria can be extended to the third rite. This is one of the most difficult points in the application of the ritual»⁷⁰

The Church asks to promote a deepening of an authentic understanding of the sacramental discipline especially of the third rite. However, until the present time, there are still a lot of authors who consider that the third rite is the most appropriate celebration of the sacrament most specifically that it responds to the calling of the Vatican to have a communal celebration.

There are different reactions coming from the theologians, authors and even from the faithful. Some accept the third rite, some criticize it, while some have negative comments regarding the conditions; others have a positive way of seeing the celebration.

Some positive observations regarding the celebration of the general absolution are: «the faithful are all coming to general absolution and have found him in the new rites... general confession and absolution is very helpful to recognize the need of the sacrament in their lives... general absolution is the best experience that they have... it meets practical as well as spiritual needs... confession never became a meaningful or helpful sacrament until general absolution... general absolution symbolizes the real meaning of the word reconciliation because it involves the social aspect of sin.»⁷¹

On the other hand, there are also others who claim, «general absolution breaks the wonderful experience that they have in the past regarding the private confession... there are many advantages of confession, one can discuss sin, priest can view the problem and understand it... in general absolution the intimacy is gone, general absolution cheats the penitent... don't feel comfortable with general absolution, general absolution as influenced by the protestant... doubts if they are really being absolved, people are losing contact with sacramental confession and they are losing one on one contact with the priest as well as the medicinal aspect of the sacrament.»⁷²

If we are just going to listen to what the people experience and to what is applicable today and make them as the basis of making the rites, then, the Church can never arrive to a definite celebration since all of them have different experiences. This criterion is something relative. Besides, the rite does not depend so much on the commentaries of the faithful, but it is more of being faithful on how it is being instituted by Christ. «God knows us better than we know ourselves. God is also eager to forgive us and to welcome us into a life of deeper love and faithfulness. But the Church, based on the words of Jesus Christ, requires that sins be confessed to a priest for the sacramental forgiveness to take place. So, what seems to be an embarrassing requirement is, actually, a carefully structured method designed by God that will bring us a rich experience and valuable insight.»⁷³

1.2.1. The Problem of the Third Rite as rooted on the Issue of the Integrity of Confession

In Chapter VII of this study, the different specific issues on the third rite based on the observations and presentations of the different authors were discussed as follows: 1) the question on the need of restriction to celebrate the third rite; 2) the meaning of the case of necessity; 3) the lack of uniformity among the bishops or authorities in implementing the third rite and determining the situation, 4) the claim that it is the most communal celebration; 5) the question on the need to confess our sins if they are already forgiven during the celebration of the third rite

If the questions will just be given a closer look, one can conclude that they are connected to each other and can be summed up to only one question.: ‘Is private confession essential in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?’ If it is not essential, then there is no need for the restriction of the celebration; neither to require it as to be celebrated only in case of necessity. There is no need for a bishop to determine when it can be celebrated and to require the penitents to look for a priest and avail of the private confession. R. Gula confirms this in saying that the «The Trent’s teaching that an integral confession of mortal sins is required by Divine law had once been thought a stumbling block against general absolution as valid sacramental forgiveness.»⁷⁴

On the other hand, if private confession is essential in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, then it answers all the doubts and questions. There is a need of restriction of the celebration since the celebration itself does not include private confession. There is already a reason to celebrate it in the case of necessity since it lacks an integral part.

«Individual Integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses them from this kind of confession.»⁷⁵ This is the firm conviction of the Church, consistent in her teaching that by the Divine law, it is necessary that penitents confess to a priest. Therefore in no way can one celebrate ordinarily a sacrament without confession if a priest can be reached. The celebration of the third rite is done with some restrictions and conditions. One can never use any other way as an alternative just for pastoral reason.

If we observe, the third rite does not remove the private confession, rather it is still included; only that it will be celebrated afterwards because there is

no possibility of celebrating it during that moment. «Those who receive pardon for grave sins by a common absolution should go to individual confession before they receive this kind of absolution again.»⁷⁶ Confession does not disappear, and never in any case that it disappear, because it is an element desired by God. This is the doctrine of the church. The church can put back or delay a constitutive element of the sacrament like what in the past happened.»⁷⁷

Consequently, it is very important that one has to consider the importance of the private confession as an integral part in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As an integral part, it must always be a part of the celebration whenever it is possible. If ever this is not part of the third rite, it is because the situation does not allow it. «The church insists that confession should be undertaken even when one has already been absolved through general absolution precisely because this personal encounter is so valuable.»⁷⁸

1.2.2. The Issue on the Restriction of the Third Rite

The problem that the Church experiences regarding the third rite is the abuse of the celebration of the general absolution without taking into consideration the conditions and restrictions.

While the Church claim that the third form of the Rites of Penance cannot be celebrated in any time or in any situation, some of the authors question the presence of the restrictions of the celebration. They claim that there is no need for any restrictions of the third rite and to consider it as an ordinary celebration like that of the two rites. Some even consider the third rite as a most perfect model in celebration the sacrament. These different position and claims lead to tension and to confusion most especially to the faithful.

John Paul II even writes an apostolic letter *Misericordia Dei* in response to the improper use in some countries of general confession and general absolution that have been used as the normal method in recent years. He also addresses this in some of his ad limina visits. The Congregation of Divine Worship also insists on the same thing regarding the abuse of the celebration of third rite and of the use of the general absolution. They «made several observations concerning the authentic discipline of the Sacrament of Penance, in particular concerning the altogether exceptional situations apart from which general absolution may never be administered.»⁷⁹

There is a restriction of the celebration of the third rite because it lacks an immediate celebration of the individual confession that is an integral part

of the Sacrament. J. Medina in explaining the necessity of the sacrament conveys «Since it is the will of God, then a priest ought to avail it, but if it is not possible then he has to avail it later on.»⁸⁰ This is also the case of the general absolution. The third rite can never be understood as setting aside or eliminating the act of confession, but it is just more of postponing it, since it is physically impossible. Therefore, one has to remember that the penitent is still obliged to confess his sins after the general absolution. «The priests with pastoral responsibility have the obligation to offer to the faithful the possibility to go to confession through two ordinary ways and no priests are allowed to give public absolution without the permission of his bishop.»⁸¹

A theologian who opposes the restriction of the third rite, will never understand the reason of the restriction if in the first place he denies that individual confession is an integral part of the Sacrament. The Church has consistently maintained the integrity of the confession to a priest. In this way, we can see that in no way can we make the third rite an ordinary rite without any restriction since we cannot make confession as an option.

1.2.3. The Claim that the Third Rite is the Most Communal Celebration

The common argument of those who are in favor of making the third rite an ordinary celebration is the claim that it expresses the most communal celebration compared to the other two rites. It is the most appropriate response to the calling of the Vatican II in making the celebration more communal. As others may claim, «In spite of the conciliar charge that communal celebrations involving the presence and active participation of the faithful are to be preferred to celebrations that are individual and quasi-private the introduction of the rite insists that the ordinary way for reconciliation remains individual integral confession and absolution.»⁸²

But it is not the case. In spite of the declaration of the Church that the individual, integral confession is the ordinary way to celebrate the sacrament, in spite of the consistent teaching of the Church that the act of confession is an integral part of the sacrament by Divine mandate, there are some who insist to make the general absolution an ordinary celebration.

It is observed that confusion exists because of «lack of formation and information, disorientation, confusion between the rites, and the confusion in theological, liturgical, pastoral, and moral matter.»⁸³ One has to remem-

ber that «our answer will always refer to what Christ has said and done. The church is not a caretaker of Divine mercy, but only an administrator. She acts as transmitter of the forgiveness of Jesus. Never can she place herself above her Lord. Then, Christ always forgives the concrete person. The ultimate destination of his forgiveness is not for anonymous, but each of us. The forgiveness given to all without taking into consideration the individuals is something impersonal. But all the sacraments are personal even if they are celebrated community. God also forgives each one of us personally. What do you expect if a doctor gives the same medication for all. Each one of us is loved personally by God and needs to receive the forgiveness that is needed and adopts his proper circumstances.»⁸⁴

The third rite may be the most communal celebration of the Sacrament, but it is not sufficient to disregard the importance of the private confession. When the Second Vatican Council calls for a renewal of the celebration and make it more communal, I believe that it is not in the mind of the council to insist it to be communal even to the extent of sacrificing or taking away the integral parts.

It must be noted that the celebration of the third rite is only allowed when it seems impossible to receive individual confession and it is in case of necessity. Although the third rite is very rich in its expression on the communal dimension, one has to remember that sin is personal in nature. The responsibility lies in each individual and therefore one has to ask pardon personally and not collectively. «The Sacrament of Reconciliation exists for the forgiveness of personal sins rather than social sin.»⁸⁵ J. Ratzinger in his letter on the intervention on the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *Misericordia Dei*, states that «the *Motu Proprio* emphasizes the personalist nature of the Sacrament of Penance: as the sin, despite all our bonds with the human community, is ultimately something totally personal, so also our healing with forgiveness has to be something that is totally personal... That means that the personal confession and the forgiveness directed to this person are constitutive parts of the sacrament. Collective absolution is an extraordinary form that is possible only in strictly determined cases of necessity; it also supposes, as something that belongs to the nature of the sacrament, the will to make the personal confession of sins, as soon as it will be possible to do so.»⁸⁶

The celebration of the sacrament must promote both personal and communal celebration. It must be a personal conversion that does not deprive a communal celebration, nor a communal celebration that deprives the personal conversion. «Since the sacrament of penance is a part of a very personal pro-

cess of conversion it is clear that the sacrament itself should also be a personal experience.⁸⁷

It may be true that the third form is the most communal celebration of the three rites, but it must be noted also that the communal aspect is also present in the other two rites. Even in the first form of the rite which is the private confession and absolution, there is also a communal aspect since the minister represents the whole Church. It must also be noted that what is important in the sacrament is not only the communal celebration but also to consider the personal nature of the sin. These two must be balanced.

What is also more ironic with the radical implementation of the communal practice is a tendency to consider sin as more of a rupture of relationship with the Church rather than consider sin as primarily a rupture with God. «In contemporary theological reflections on guilt and reconciliation, the attention seems to have shifted more and more from the relationship between God and men, towards interpersonal relationships. Words like sin, guilt and forgiveness no longer function primarily within the context of the relationship between the sinner and God. Actions are understood to be wrong insofar as they hurt others or maybe even oneself, but no insofar as they offend God.»⁸⁸

1.2.4. The Need to Confess of the Sins already Forgiven

The last question is theological in its approach. «Why must a penitent ‘reconfess’ his sin in a private way after general sacramental confession if all grave sins and all eternal punishment for such grave sins have been removed? None of the person’s sins returned if they have already been forgiven.»⁸⁹

This question is very misleading and has a tendency to dichotomize the parts of the sacrament rather than see it as a single reality. Of course God does not bring back sins already forgiven. A person can already receive the Eucharist worthily. He needs to have a perfect contrition and truly be sorry with his sins during the celebration, so that he can have a worthy celebration of the third form. Nevertheless, there are few important points that have to be taken into consideration.

First, the general absolution is given because there is a necessity to receive pardon, but has no possibility for the penitents to have private confessions. Otherwise, if everybody can avail of the private confession then never can general absolution be given. According to J. Ratzinger, «It is not in the power of the Church to replace personal confession with general absolution.»⁹⁰

Secondly, the penitent is informed to go to confession prior to the celebration. The penitent is aware of his obligation to avail of the confession before the celebration of the third rite. The question here is not if he is forgiven or not, rather on the sincerity of the person of his obligation to go to confession. What can we say to a person who promises something to God but never fulfills it?

It is like a person who borrows a book but he forgets to bring one of the requirements. But with the generosity of the librarian, he grants the request of the person with a condition that he is going to go back and bring the lacking requirement. Of course the librarian cannot anymore retrieve what he has given even if the person lacks the sufficient requirement. But the question is, what if the person will come again and ask for a favor again without fulfilling his promise, do you think the librarian will lend it to him again or will he question the sincerity of the person?

Of course one may say that this analogy cannot be applied to the mercy of God since his love and mercy is unconditional. However this illustration can help us reflect that the issue beyond the third rite is not the mercy of God but worthiness of the person to receive the mercy of God after not fulfilling his obligation. It is always true that God forgives repentant sinners, but on the part of man, to be repentant is also to be sincere. And being repentant is an important act for a person to be forgiven.

When a person has asked why confess his sins to a priest, J. Upton simply answered «From God's point of view, there is no reason. But from the human point of view, though, we need to see, hear, and feel forgiveness, not just think about it.»⁹¹ She adds «God's mercy embraces the repentant sinner. God does not need sacraments in order to express and effect that reconciliation, and as Church, we need sacraments to experience the enduring presence of God-with-us.»⁹² While D. Coffey also states «If we refuse to avail ourselves of the means that God has revealed as his way of forgiving sins, such a refusal is an indication that our contrition is not sincere. Without confession, we would be laying down to God the conditions under which we would accept forgiveness from him or at best we would be presuming that he will forgive our sins our way rather than the way he has actually revealed as his way.»⁹³

1.3. *The Necessity of the Act of Confession*

Why not directly to God? This is the common question on the Sacrament of Reconciliation both by lay people and of the Protestants. This ques-

tion refers to two different issues on the concept of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. First is the minister, and second is the means. The first issue focuses on the question, is there really a need to go to a confessor in order to be forgiven? Can a person not go directly to God? While the second is more on the question 'In what way, can I be forgiven? Do I just need to present myself to him and say I am sorry for my sins and the priest is going to give me the absolution? Do I just need to attend the penitential ceremony? Is the general absolution with the priest sufficient for the forgiveness of sins without a need of going to confession?

Most of the time, whenever the question of the sacrament is raised, the theologian focuses on the first issue and forgets that there is another issue being asked, why is there a need to confess and tells one's sins? Indeed this is the issue beyond the tensions happening in the rites of Penance, specifically on the issue on general absolution. The first question has already been discussed and the focus of this discussion is on the second issue.

There are two opposing positions within the Catholic theologians regarding the necessity of confession in the celebration of the sacrament. «One group would believe that the presence of confession is not necessary so that the celebration of penance would have a sacramental character. In consequence, they provide all the means of argument to constrain its use, until it becomes useless and unnecessary of the practice of confession. On the other hand, the other theological perspective leads their teachings towards the affirmation of this practice.»⁹⁴

There are some who get away from the sacrament because of the negative experiences that they have in confession. But it is not a general experience. «The ritual of confession has been a mixed experience for most Catholics. Sometimes confession has been a real release from the burden of sin, while for others it has been simply a burden. Others are touched, while others are unmoved and bored. Some see it as an occasion of grace while others do not.»⁹⁵ Those who have a negative experience with the individual confessions stop availing of the sacrament. They never give a chance to experience the real power of the sacrament. They judge confession how they feel prior to confession, that is shame, fear, doubts and alike.

It is but significant to quote the statement of the Council regarding liturgy and the essence of the celebration. «The Liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change.»⁹⁶ While there are some aspects in the celebration that need to be revised, updated, and

changed with the passage of time, there are elements which the Church has no authority to revise or alter. With this we are going to deal on the element of the individual confession.

Is individual confession necessary for the forgiveness of sins? When Christ instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation, did he intend that the penitent must confess his sins to his minister? These are some of the questions that we need to clarify to have a clear understanding on the integrity of confession.

Most of the time the reason of the need to confess one's sin to a minister is limited to the judicial dimension of the sacrament. The priest acts as a judge who needs to know the case otherwise he cannot exercise the office of a judge. Therefore, the penitent has to tell his sins to a priest. Those who want to disregard the act of confession try to ignore the judicial dimension of the sacrament, thinking that by doing so, there is no way that the Church would require them to make confession as obligatory.

There are different reasons why the penitent needs to confess his sins and the judicial aspect of the sacrament is just one of the main reasons. The most significant reason is that Christ has established and willed it when he gave the authority to the apostles to forgive sin. In spite of many accusation and questions regarding the essentiality of confession by some authors, the Congregation for divine worship and discipline insists that the norm set is not of the catholic authorities rather of the Divine law. «The norms in force concerning the Sacrament of Penance are found in the Rite of Penance of the Roman Ritual and in the Code of Canon Law, and are based on divine law, the constant doctrine of the Church and her traditional practice.»⁹⁷

1.3.1. The Act of Confession in the Sacred Scripture

From the very start, it is observed how God desires that man should express himself not just in mind and heart but also through words. It is the nature of man to express what he feels. People praise, express their faith, pray, and thank Him through words. Why not also express our sorrow and repentance through word and to a person whom He has appointed?

After the fall, Adam and Eve were afraid of God that they hid themselves. As S. Hahn describes it, «The reaction of the first parents... they docked behind the bushes as if they could hide themselves from an all-knowing, and all loving Father and put the finger to others. Adam first blamed his helpmate and then blamed God: You gave me this woman and she gave me the fruit.»⁹⁸

The same thing happened to Cain when God asked him where his brother was, and he tried to hide it by answering, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' If ever God asked Cain, Adam and Eve what they have done, it is not because God does not know what had happened. But rather, He just wanted them to confess what they have done.

John Chrysostom mentions this in his homily, «I have in scripture one who confessed the sin and loosed it, and one who did not and consequently was condemned for envy... The one who knows for certain all things asked, not because He did not know, but to drag the murderer toward repentance... God neglected Cain and did not accept him because he was not the first to tell the sin.»⁹⁹

Furthermore, God also told Moses to confess their sins. He even gave them ritual ways to confess their sins.¹⁰⁰ This confession may not be the sacrament that we receive today, but the point there is that from the very beginning, God has willed that man needs to express his repentance not just by heart but by words and actions.

The New Testament has also some passages that show the need to tell how the apostles urge the people to tell their sins. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans states that sincerity of asking forgiveness must be done, not just by heart or mind but must be expressed in words, «For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.»¹⁰¹ In the letter of James, he asks the people to call a presbyter whenever somebody is sick, and confess if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven.¹⁰²

The scripture never explicitly shows that Christ himself says that man has to tell and confess his sins to the priest in order to be forgiven but «looking at how he wants to make those who have repented, and how the Church practiced from the very start of the ministry, there is no doubt in saying that confession is really an integral part of the forgiveness of mortal sin. What God has asked from Adam, Eve, Cain, and the Israelites 'for them to be responsible of their deeds, and confess their sins with true sorrows'»¹⁰³

1.3.2. Confession and the Judicial Dimension of the Institution of the Sacrament

There are many reasons why one needs to confess. It can be an aid to repentance, a converting ordinance. It deepens and develops the spirit of penance, increases faith, promotes repentance and conversion, or is an efficacious

sign of reconciliation.¹⁰⁴ But while there are different reasons why there is a need to confess, the primary reason is that the way the sacrament is instituted necessitates and demands an act of confession.

The Council of Trent gives a very clear reason of the necessity of confession in the sacrament basing it on the way it is instituted by Christ. According to the Council, «the passage in the gospel of John did not talk about absolution without confession because forgiveness and remission of sin cannot be administered if a minister does not yet know the sins that need to be heard, to be known and can be judged if it can be forgiven or not.»¹⁰⁵

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Church is firm that the sacrament by Divine institution has a judicial dimension. «Christ did not mention explicitly the confession of sin... but the words of Christ in the gospel implies necessarily the confession or declaration of sin to the minister that exercises the authority of Christ.»¹⁰⁶

The judicial dimension implies the necessity of the act of confession or the need to tell his sins to the minister, otherwise the mandate of forgiving and retaining would be insignificant. «We must confess our sins to the priest so that he can make a judgment as to whether we have the proper disposition to be forgiven or not. This echoes our understanding of the Council of Trent, on a simple fact of human psychology that a forgiving community or person empowered by God in that community cannot forgive in a sacramental or human way without knowing what the injury is.»¹⁰⁷

The priest has an obligation to advice, guide the penitent, direct the conscience and be able to discern towards conversion. A priest can never fulfill his role if there is no confession. «The lack of material integrity that is referring to confession hinders the minister to exercise his mission as a judge.»¹⁰⁸

Its judicial dimension is not just made by the Church neither also did Christ explicitly pronounced that man needs to confess his sins. But the way the sacrament is instituted shows that it has a judicial dimension in the forgiveness of sins. In this case, the minister who needs to know the sincerity of the penitent has to hear the sins of the penitent. According to John Paul II «the confession of sins is required first of all, because the sinner must be known by the person who in the sacrament exercises the role of judge. He has to evaluate both the seriousness of the sins and the repentance of the penitent; he also exercises the role of the healer and must acquaint himself with the condition of the sick person in order to treat and heal him.»¹⁰⁹

1.3.3. Confession in the History and Development of the Church

According to J. Dallen, «the understanding and practice of the sacrament have changed over the centuries, the essential elements have remained constant.»¹¹⁰ The study believes that the act of confession is one of the essential elements that have remained constant.

One of the reasons why some of the authors doubt the statement of the Church that God mandated confession is because of the lack of continuity of confession in the early Church. They claim that private confession developed in the later part of the eleventh century. This claim is based on the famous practice of public penance in the past before the practice of private confession. «it appears definitely that towards the close of the second century the practice of public penance had assumed a normal or technical setting.»¹¹¹ They even accuse the Council of Trent as lacking in historical basis. The reality of the continuity of the act of confession is even considered by K. Osborne as one of the unresolved issues.

But it is not reasonable to conclude that confession did not exist in the past just because of the emphasis on the public penance. The practice of the public penance does not negate the existence of the individual confession in the past. The misunderstanding of the practice of the early Church is the confusion given to public penance as the only part of the celebration.

It is very understandable why there are authors who misunderstand and claim that individual confession did not exist before the eleventh century. It is because what is evident in the past is the public penance, misconceiving it as a public confession. Palmer states «The document of the first five centuries refers almost exclusively to public penance. For this reason many contemporary historians both catholic and protestant trace the origins of private penance as a normal discipline to the Churches of Ireland, Wales and Britain.»¹¹²

This public penance refers more on the long penance given in public by the bishop to the penitent. Although it is the most important, it is just a part of the celebration. Prior to giving the public penance, the penitent has to approach the bishop. The confession of sin exists though it is unnoticeable, because the emphasis was given to the public penance.

It may be true that there were times that after a private confession, the bishop asked the penitent to have a public confession especially if his sin is publicly known. But it has always been a practice before that a sinner has to go to the bishop before he presents the sinner to the community.

J. Dallen, who criticizes the previous practice of private confession, mentions about the existence of individual confession in the past. In discussing about the ancient practice of penance he mentions that, «Communal disciplinary and liturgical structures developed to highlight the Church's authority over sin. Those who had begun to repent spoke privately with the bishop or his delegate. They entered the order of penitents in a public liturgical rite.»¹¹³ «The first step in the discipline was confession, either to the bishop or in the more populous Churches of Rome, Antioch and Constantinople to a presbyter appointed for this office. Whether or not the sinner was exhorted or obliged to confess to the community the sins he was doing penance is not clear.»¹¹⁴

The term *exomologesis* leads also to understanding about the practice of confession. Though the term may not be applied to the way we understand the term confession today, there are three complementary meanings of the term *exomologesis*. «It signifies confession of faith in God, giving praise to God, and expressing his own faults. The act of confession implies renewal of faith and trust in the mercy of God, giving thanks for the gift of his mercy and knowing one's weakness confessing his own sin.»¹¹⁵

The existence of the word *exomologesis*, may lead us to see that it was not the public penance which was the first thing that the community practiced, but rather people were already confessing their sins. The public penance and confession were just encouraged because of the public sins being committed by the community especially during the time of persecution.

During the middle of fifth century, Pope Leo the Great reacted when he had learned that the penitents were asked to write their sins and read it loudly that he asked them to cease promptly. M. Hellwig describes that Leo state it is quite sufficient to confess one's sins to God and then in secret confession to a priest who is a suppliant on behalf of penitents.»¹¹⁶ M. Hellwig continues in saying that the «text is of special interest because it shows that *exomologesis* did not traditionally include a public confession of specific sins.»¹¹⁷ It is important to distinguish public confession from public penance. They are two different realities.

We can identify some evidences how the different writers of the Fathers of the Church mention about the existence of confession of sins. Tertullian states, «The act of *exomologesis*, by which we confess our sin to the Lord, not because he knows it but in as much as by confession satisfaction is ordered, from confession, repentance springeth, by repentance, God is appeased.»¹¹⁸

On the other hand, St. Clement of Rome writes, «It is better for a man to confess his sins than to harden his heart, as the heart of those who rebelled against Moses, the servant of God.»¹¹⁹ Then in his second letter, he further mentions, «repent with our whole heart of the evil things we have done in the flesh, that we may be saved by the Lord while we have time for repentance. For after leaving the world we cannot there confess or repent anymore.»¹²⁰

The same thing can be seen in the letter of Barnabas. «Do not cause quarrels, but bring together and reconcile those who quarrel. Confess your sins. Do not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light.»¹²¹ While in Didache, it conveys that «You shall confess your offenses in Church and shall not come forward to your prayer with a bad conscience. This is the way of life.»¹²²

Origen while teaching at Caesarea towards the middle of the third century indicates that those persons who submit to the penance of the church made their confession to a priest of the Lord who indicated the penance or penalty. This penance takes the severe form of the early *exomologesis*. The penance is an open and public humiliation.»¹²³

J. Chrysostom also states in some of his homilies regarding the need to tell their sins. «Therefore, why do we not go to Church everyday in order to embrace repentance? If you are a sinner, come to Church in order to tell your sins.»¹²⁴ We were saying how repentance is easy, and that there is no burden in it. Are you sinner? Enter into the Church and say, I have sinned and you dissolve the sin.»¹²⁵ «You stated your sin, you are justified. You repented, you have shown mercy... one individual may wait a long time and not gain salvation, and another who confesses genuinely, is stripped of the sin inside a short time.»¹²⁶

Cyprian in his Treatise to the lapse during the year 251 states: «Let each one confess his sin, I beseech you, brethren, while he who has sinned is still in this world, while his confession can be admitted, while the satisfaction and remission effected through the priest is pleasing with the Lord.»¹²⁷ «We have an advocate and intercessor for our sins, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and God provided only we repent that we have sinned in the past and confessing and acknowledging our sins by which we now have offended the Lord,»¹²⁸ «With the presentation of St. Cyprian, O. Watkins, conveys that «the confession of penitent does not appear to be made in the open congregation but to the priest, who hears it and indicates the measure of penance. The penance is an open and public humiliation.»¹²⁹

1.3.4. The Statement of the Teaching of the Church

The Council of Trent makes it clear that in the Canon VI of its fourteenth session, God mandates integral confession. «If any one denies, either that sacramental confession was instituted, or is necessary to salvation, of divine right; or says, that the manner of confessing secretly to a priest alone, which the Church hath ever observed from the beginning, and doth observe, is alien from the institution and command of Christ, and is a human invention; let him be anathema.»¹³⁰

Paul VI insists in one of his messages that it is not possible to modify the third rite or to derogate from them for any reason, and must always be considered to be an exceptional character.¹³¹ On the other hand, John Paul II affirms on the necessity of the individual confession with personal celebration in the celebration of Sacrament. In this document, he even emphasizes the different restrictions and conditions of the celebration of the general absolution. J. Medina describes the *Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei* as «reasserting the traditional teaching of the Church that holds that the only ordinary way to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance is with the integral confession of sins to the priest, with personal absolution. The so-called general or communal absolution is to be considered an extraordinary and exceptional means.»¹³²

While there are authors who consider the history and the changes of the celebration as the basis to consider confession as without foundation from God, John Paul II makes it clear that «Not only did this development not change the substance of the sacrament –and how could it be otherwise!– but it actually expressed this substance more clearly and made it more effective. This happened not without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who here too fulfilled the mission of leading the Church «into all truth.»¹³³

John Paul II asserts that confession is necessary and even indispensable. He states that «Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church.»¹³⁴ Quoting some important documents of the Church, John Paul II continues in saying that «The Church has always seen an essential link between the judgment entrusted to the priest in the Sacrament and the need for penitents to name their own sins except where this is not possible.»¹³⁵ (...) «It is necessary by Divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin.»¹³⁶ Therefore, there is no way that confession is subject to the discretion of the pastor.

The Congregation of Divine Worship also confirms the teaching of the Church that confession is Divine mandated. «The divine constitution of the Sacrament of Penance requires each penitent to confess to a priest all mortal sins that they themselves have no faculty to deviate from the legislation in force; Its responsibility is to safeguard and promote these norms.»¹³⁷

Furthermore, Cardinal Ratzinger when he was still the prefect of the Doctrine of Faith mentions, «therefore it is not in the power of the Church to replace personal confession... the pope reminds us of this in the new *Motu Proprio*, that expresses the Church's consciousness of the limits of her power; it expresses the bond with the word of the Lord that is binding even on the pope.»¹³⁸ On the other hand, the Congregation of Sacred Liturgy with firm conviction insists that «In this context it is of great importance to remember that even when the sacrament is received by means of a collective absolution, it nevertheless requires, as a result of its divine and irreformable foundation, that each penitent have the necessary dispositions for the reception of the sacrament, namely, individual and personal repentance for sins committed, the resolution to rectify scandal or injuries that may have been caused in relation to those sins, the intention of amending his life, and the intention to make an integral and individual confession as soon as possible of those grave sins from which he is impeded from confessing at the time. Each of these dispositions must be present in order that the sacramental absolution be received validly.»¹³⁹

Contrary to the presentation of K. Osborne that the primarily role of the priest is to preach and that he must spend more time in that area, the Congregation of liturgy insists that «other works, for lack of time, may have to be postponed or even abandoned, but not the confessional.»¹⁴⁰

1.3.5. Incarnational Principle of the Sacrament

If ever confession is a necessity in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is not because God needs it, but rather because man in his nature needs to express himself. God in His part does not need our confession, for He knows everything that we have done. He knows our sins even before we confess them, including the deepest secret of our lives. He even knows us more than ourselves.

God also knows man's condition that confessing our sins makes us much more human. «To claim that I confess my sins to God alone directly in his

thoughts and claim that he is forgiven suggests the possibility of side stepping authentic human existence, and perhaps true freedom and responsibility. To avoid bringing my sins into word may be to avoid the truth of myself.»¹⁴¹

This reality can never be doubted. As human beings, we need to express and to say it. «As a man composed of body and soul, he can only express and carry out through the corporeal manifestation. As a Christian who is a member of the Church, he could only make sense his conversion through an external sign.»¹⁴² Part of the manifestation of the real conversion of man is through the confession of sins. «Through the sign of absolution God grants pardon to the penitent who in sacramental confession manifests his change of heart to the Church's minister.»¹⁴³

God always uses human nature as means of bringing His grace. He uses man's way in dealing with our relationship with Him. Even his way of saving the world, he desired to be human like us. He could have done it in a click of his finger, but He wishes to die as a man to show His love to us.

It is the same thing when He wishes to institute the Sacrament of the forgiveness of grave sins. It is expressed in a more human way. R. Gula makes it clear in saying, «Incarnational principle or Sacramental principle is God's way to us and our way to God is in and through the human, the fleshy, the historical, the particular. There is no other way for us who are body-persons to experience the invisible except through that we can touch because touch and visible things can mean more than it appears. it is opening our eyes to a greater reality.»¹⁴⁴

Christ has adjusted himself to our level. He became like us; he spoke like using our words and our ways so that we can understand Him, and He even showed His love to us through the greatest way that we can show our love to others, by offering himself. As God communicated His very self to us through His Son who became like us, Christ also communicated his forgiveness through his minister who is one of us.

There are many reasons why man needs to confess his sins, why God uses man's way and desires that man should express his sins in order to be forgiven. First, the act of confession is a sign of humility, submission and acceptance of the sins that he has done. «God is not bound to the use of sacraments in order to confer justifying grace. The purpose of the act of confessing is by doing so the penitent subjects himself to Christ. It is in this act of submission, an act of the will, that the relationship of grace is restored.»¹⁴⁵ Even in the story of the prodigal son that he did not immediately embrace his father on his return. As

a sign of his sincere repentance, he said 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Therefore, it is a false interpretation of the parable to say that the father prohibited the son to say something; that the parable shows that confessing sin is insignificant to the Loving Father. Rather, the father allowed him to express what he wanted. There is a dialogue that happened between the Father and the son.

Second, the relationship that man has with God is an intimate one that needs communication or dialogue. It is like our relationship with others; we need to communicate and to speak. «It cannot be denied that in the heart of man exists a mystery of intimacy with God... The practice of confession of sins shows one of the gestures much significant in conversion.»¹⁴⁶

It is not only a matter of man telling his sin to God, but God has also some messages to man. He wants to speak to his people. In the Old Testament, He uses the prophets to speak in His behalf, to let the people be aware of their sinfulness, and it is also the prophets who announce to them after they have repented that they are forgiven. In the New Testament, he chose the apostles to speak in his behalf, and until now he uses man, in the person of the ordained minister to give assurance to the people that they are forgiven. «The relationship with God is also an interpersonal relation. The only difference is that we cannot see God. Our relation with him happens in behalf of mediation. He has chosen this way to express his love. He speaks in behalf of his chosen people and expresses his love through them. When man loves God, this love should also be expressed through signs and words.»¹⁴⁷ «Dialogue is included in a conversion. It is an encounter with the presence of a visible dialogue between the sinner and the church. If this dialogue is to take place, sinners must exteriorize their desire for conversion, while the Church must give expression to the promised mercy and forgiveness of God.»¹⁴⁸

The third reason is related to the second. Man in his nature needs to be reassured that he is forgiven. He needs somebody to tell him that God has forgiven him. He needs to hear the word God has forgiven you and receive the absolution «It is God's desire to give assurance to sinners, that through their demonstrated remorse and firm purpose of amendment plus the priest's sacramental absolution, they are in fact forgiven and restored to the state of grace.»¹⁴⁹ To confess directly to God, he will never know if he is able to make a sincere contrition and if his repentance has been accepted or not.

The experience of David in the Old Testament shows also how he needs assurance that God has forgiven him. After he expressed how sorry he was with

what he has done, Nathan needed to tell him «Yahweh has forgiven you»¹⁵⁰ The need of an assurance that he is forgiven is also the reason why the sacrament has a judicial character. It is not to determine if sins are forgivable or not, but it is more of determining the sincerity of the sinner of his repentance. One good example is a married woman who continues to live with a live-in partner. If there is no confession and she asks forgiveness directly to God without sincere repentance and a desire to avoid committing the same sin again, then she would never know that she lacks the sincerity of contrition.

The fourth is also related to the prior reason, as C. Walsh states, «we, human beings are masters in the art of self-deception and of hiding our faults from ourselves.»¹⁵¹ It is very easy to justify what one has done and say I am not guilty or I am already forgiven. To become the judge of his own mistake leads to the loss of the sense of sin. It blinds one's conscience and true repentance becomes impossible. God knows our weaknesses and what is best for us.

«Jesus knows well that we human beings need encouragement to face our problems and responsibilities. Christ knows that we are easily ashamed of our mistakes and would prefer to hide them away. He also knows that our hidden mistakes are never removed if no one can get at them. So, the Risen Lord Jesus gave to his Apostles a share in his ministry of reconciliation. Jesus Christ wanted others to be able to help those who sin with the same generous love and understanding he displayed in his ministry.»¹⁵²

Sincere contrition is concerned more of being humble in the eyes of God. To be humble is to submit oneself and one's sins to others, specifically to the minister of the Church to whom the power to forgive sins is entrusted. If man claims he is humble enough but still considers himself as the judge of his own sin, then the sincerity of his repentance is questionable. The need of assurance of the forgiveness of sin is a must to a person, while silence and without hearing anything make a person uneasy. «We always want to be assured that we are forgiven. That is why he has desired that this sacrament instituted by his Son for the restoration of our friendship with him conclude with the absolution that gives us an assurance that we are forgiven. Only with this that our interior recovers the peace and the joy which is taken by sin.»¹⁵³

Christ knows the weakness and limitation of man. Man can never be judged by his own, otherwise, if he is going to absolve himself, he is going to absolve sins which he is not sorry or would pardon him in advance with the

sins he is about to commit. Sincerity and contrition are lost when nobody outside of him is going to judge and tell him he is forgiven. Let us just look at the gospel of Luke, a Pharisee who tries to judge himself as righteous, claims that he is a good person, «God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.»¹⁵⁴ The Pharisee absolves himself and judges himself worthy. In return Christ praises the sinner who humbles himself in front of God more than him. The Pharisee absolved himself; but his absolution was not ratified in Heaven.

This is also the tendency of many if God has not instituted the sacrament of penance. It is either man is going to judge himself falsely or man will not be contented or doubts if forgiveness is already bestowed on him. But in the sacrament of Reconciliation, the minister in behalf of Christ pronounce the absolution as an assurance that God has forgiven the sin that he has committed. «Our Divine Lord has instituted a Sacrament to assure us of our absolution which is a judicial act, an authoritative sentence, an act pronounced by one who is impartial, and who has authority. We are not left to absolve ourselves; we are absolved in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ by a judge empowered by Christ. It is the office that absolves, the participation of that one priesthood of Christ, and it is just ministerial in the part of the priest.»¹⁵⁵

Fifth, is the effect that we get from confession. It takes away the burden that we feel and it is a necessary step to holiness. «Confession is essential for the authentic transformation in Christ»¹⁵⁶ Confession helps us to appreciate the damage we have done by our actions while we are given an appropriate penance.

God knows our nature and God makes use on how he has created us in manifesting his forgiveness and feels the effect of the sacrament in our lives. Nobody can doubt about the reality that «confessing to a priest is entirely different from confessing in the secret of your heart, which is exposed to the many insecurities and ambiguities that fill our lives. On your own, you will never know what has touched you is the grace of God or your own emotions, if you have forgiven yourself or by God. When you are absolved by the person the Lord has chosen and sent as the minister of forgiveness, you can experience the freedom that only God gives, and understand why confession is a source of peace.»¹⁵⁷

Confession is a necessary step for holiness, «It is important to remember in our confession that we are not telling God anything He does not already know. He knows our sins better than we do. He wants us to confess not for His

good but for ours, because he knows that confession is a necessary step in our process of healing toward holiness.»¹⁵⁸

An illustration of an academic setting can help the study explain profoundly. The teacher has to adjust to the grade level of the student. A professor is not supposed to teach the student about college level topics to a grade one pupil. It is not the students who adjust but it is the professor who adjusts to the level of the students. While the professor adjusts to the level of the student, the professor brings his students to a higher level.

It is also the same experience in the sacrament. While God adjusts himself and uses the way of man to make his forgiveness present, he also elevates his ministries to perform the power he has endowed to them. Through the sacrament, the penitent is brought to a higher level. It is the restoration of his sanctifying grace, and an instrument toward holiness.

The signs and symbols also are instruments of God to see a deeper reality and through this we see the mystery of the love of God. «The whole point of celebrating sacramentally is to provide human situations in which we can respond in a tangible and visible way to our experiences of God in Christ, People in love make signs of love, not only to express their love but also to deepen it.»¹⁵⁹ God knows what is in our heart and our intention. He has desired forgiveness to be done, proper to human being and the human approach is also necessary. «He also knows how miserable we would be if we could not unload that burden. The divine master knew what was in man, so he instituted the sacrament not for his needs but for ours. It was his way of giving man a happy heart.»¹⁶⁰

Lastly, the necessity of confession goes hand on hand with the significance of the act of penance. Confession helps us to appreciate the damage we have done by our actions by doing some penance. «It is not that God wants us to feel awful about ourselves. Rather, God wants us to be realistic so that we can seek and accept a healing that matches the injury.»¹⁶¹ The practice of penance is based on the sins being confessed. The minister always gives a specific penance to the penitent according to the deeds that one has committed. Although it has been a practice that the basic prayers are the ones given for penance, it is not limited to that. If penance is related to the sins committed, how can a minister know what penance to give if there is no confession?

Consequently, the reality of confession and penance denotes the judicial dimension of the sacrament. It is also unthinkable to impose the same penance to all the people present during the celebration, or to let the person decide his

own penance. As it has stated, «another benefit in bringing our sins to the sacrament is in the penance we are given. The priest asks us to fulfill some work of prayer, charity, or reparation to help make up for what we have done. This is an assignment that must be completed before the forgiveness takes effect. If it were only up to us, we might never assign ourselves such a task. The sacrament of Penance provides a structure where we find what we need in order to seek and experience God's mercy in the fullest possible way.»¹⁶²

In conclusion, because confession is an essential part of the sacrament of Reconciliation, even during the rites of the general absolution, the faithful are still required to make an individual confession. It is not something that the Church can just take for granted nor can the Church just take it away from the celebration.

1.4. *Perfect Contrition as Sufficient for the forgiveness of sins and the act of Confession*

The seemingly contradictory positions of confession as an ordinary way to forgive sins, and perfect contrition as sufficient to forgive sin, are issues presented by K. Osborne.

The Church teaches that perfect contrition can forgive grave sins. But this teaching of the Church does not oppose another teaching that 'the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the only ordinary way to forgive grave sins.' One may ask how can the Church claim that it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation the only ordinary way if Contrition also is a means for the forgiveness of sins? The «major medieval theologians have agreed that an act of perfect contrition by itself was the moment when serious sin was forgiven.»¹⁶³

Before answering the question, we need to bear in mind, that there are two different kinds of contrition, the perfect and imperfect contrition that is also known as attrition. It is clear that not all contrition is sufficient for the forgiveness of sin, but rather only the perfect contrition moved out of the love of God and not out of fear of the punishment. Does the imperfect contrition bring justification when that contrition is manifested through the Sacrament of Reconciliation? A. Cuschieri makes it clear in saying that «contrition and not attrition brings about justification... Only when the Power of the Keys is actually in operation does attrition suffice. It was precisely the intent of the Lord in instituting the Sacrament of Reconciliation that the Power of the Keys substitutes the inadequacy of human love.»¹⁶⁴ Therefore, it is very im-

portant to distinguish the two kinds of contrition and the necessity of attrition to avail of the Sacrament.

How about perfect contrition? Is there a need to confess and be absolved if the act of contrition itself suffices for the forgiveness of sins? In answering this question, we have to consider two important points. First, perfect contrition forgives sin including grave sins. But this phrase «perfect contrition forgives grave sin» is not the complete statement of the Church. The complete teaching of the church is, «When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called perfect. Such contrition remits venial sins and obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.»¹⁶⁵

The phrase ‘if it includes the firm resolution to confess’ is an important component for the perfect contrition to forgive grave sin because perfect contrition is a contrition of charity and includes the willingness to follow the will of God and the prescription of the Church to whom forgiveness is entrusted.

Although contrition is the most important act of the penitent, it is not ordinarily sufficient for salvation or for justification. According to A. Cuschieri, «contrition by itself does not procure personal justification; it must be accompanied, at the same time, by the desire of receiving sacramental absolution»¹⁶⁶ In order that contrition will be perfect, it includes an intention to confess his sins when it is possible. Although contrition is the most essential, it does not consist of the total requirement for justification when confession is available.

To explain this matter further, the importance of the phrase, ‘has an intention or has a desire’ needs to be understood. The phrase used is ‘desire of receiving absolution’ and not has to receive an absolution. This must not also be misunderstood that the intention is sufficient for the justification of man. But one ought to ask for absolution if he has a chance. The word desire is very important since not all repentant sinners have the opportunity to receive an absolution or to go to the priest for confession. The most common example are the people who live in a remote area where there is no possibility for a priest to reach them or when a person is in danger of death and no priest is available. A. Cuschieri conveys «Contrition by itself suffices for one’s justification when the Sacrament of Reconciliation is unavailable.»¹⁶⁷ Again the clause ‘when the Sacrament of Reconciliation is unavailable’ must be given emphasis rather than just focus on the statement that contrition is enough. This practice and use of perfect contrition

without private confession must not be abused. The penitent has to be sincere in his desire to avail of the sacrament. Therefore we can say that a true contrition includes the intention to avail of confession. «This contrition by Divine precept has no intrinsic value unless it is accompanied by the desire for the Sacrament. That is to say, that this same desire for the Sacrament (*votum sacramenti*) authenticates contrition. Consequently if this desire is indeed a genuine desire, it must comply with divine precept as soon as the sacrament is available.»¹⁶⁸

What is the difference of the effect between contrition and attrition if both need to avail of the Sacrament? Contrition is coupled with the desire of availing the sacrament, and it suffices justification when the sacrament is not available; while attrition must be coupled not only with the desire but the need to avail of the sacrament.

2. PASTORAL ASPECTS

This part of the study is a theological analysis to some of the issues presented in chapter four and seven regarding the pastoral aspect of the sacrament. They are the confusion of the existence of the other mean of reconciliation in relation to the sacrament, the question on the efficacy of the sacrament, and the issues on justification.

2.1. *Other Means of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation*

The other misunderstanding of the minister of the sacrament is an obscure distinction between the ordinary act of reconciliation and reconciliation as sacrament. The Church as a sacrament of reconciliation offers different means of reconciling her members to the community. But the problem is that the specific Sacrament of Reconciliation is understood as just one of the means of the reconciliation offered by the Church. «Much of the neglect of this sacrament in our own time seems to stem from the realization that God will forgive us in many ways besides through the sacrament. Some falsely conclude, therefore, that there is no need for the sacrament.»¹⁶⁹

The existence of the other means of reconciliation do not make the Sacrament of Reconciliation insignificant, rather the celebration of the former leads them to the celebration of the latter. «The penitent centers himself on

the gift of reconciliation given by God to his sin. To reach this end, the key in all the penitential reform insist in the positive aspect of the sacrament that has been viewed as an action of grace by the love of God and transcend from negative vision of penance which man has been accustomed with.»¹⁷⁰ Other forms of reconciliation should lead to a deeper appreciation of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Connecting the sacrament to the sacramentality of the ministry of Christ and the Church is a great contribution of the theology after the Vatican. It also includes in presenting and connecting the different sacraments to the aspect of reconciliation. The relation of the different sacraments and the other reconciliatory means, is given importance to show that each form of reconciliation is not opposing each other nor can be an alternative but complementing each other. According to R. Gula, «the ministry of reconciliation is the responsibility of the whole Christian community, and the proper approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to keep the multiple relationships and the interconnections in proper perspective.»¹⁷¹

The different forms of reconciliation and the sacraments as having moments of reconciliation, have their own concern and place in the ministry of the Church. There are some which are celebrated in private especially if the matter is non-grave sin.

If there are some reconciliations that can be celebrated in private like contrition and mortification, there are also reconciliations that need the absolution of the minister in order to be forgiven. This ministry of forgiveness is regarded as the continuation of the ministry of Christ, a ministry entrusted to Christ by the Father, and handed on to the apostles. He transferred to the apostles the mission that He himself has received from the Father. «The universal agreement of the Father has always been understood that by such a striking action and by such clear words the power of remitting and of retaining sins, and of reconciling the faithful who have fallen after baptism was communicated to the apostles and to their legitimate successor.»¹⁷² In no way that the sacrament of Reconciliation contradicts the other forms of reconciliation nor the latter a hindrance to avail of the sacrament, rather instead it enhances the more. K. Osborne makes it clear that «while it is in the sacrament of reconciliation where we avail the forgiveness of sins and reconciled with God and the Church, the other non-sacramental reconciliation is an aid to the process of conversion that man experience in the sacrament.»¹⁷³

The mission of reconciliation in general is not only given to the apostles and to their successors but is given to the whole Church. It is the whole community who has the task to perform this. John Paul II mentions

«To the hands and lips of the apostles, his messengers, the Father has mercifully entrusted a ministry of reconciliation, which they carry out in a singular way by virtue of the power to act «in persona Christi.» But the message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world.»¹⁷⁴

And he adds:

«The Church is reconciling inasmuch as she proclaims the message of reconciliation as she has always done throughout her history, from the apostolic Council of Jerusalem. The Church is also reconciling inasmuch as she shows man the paths and offers the means for reaching this fourfold reconciliation.»¹⁷⁵

These two forms of reconciliation, namely the reconciliation entrusted to the apostles and the mission of reconciliation in the Church must not be confused with each other. One must not consider the role of the successors of the apostles to reconcile the repentant sinners also as role of the whole community. The task of the community as a witness and as somebody who promotes reconciliation does not make them share the authority given by Christ to the Apostles.

The Church is the basic sacrament of reconciliation because it is to her that the mission of Christ has entrusted. God has willed that the rupture of communion with God will be restored through the Church He has founded. The Church tries to bring back to communion with God and with the Church those who have been separated because of sin. «The church seeks to show the merciful love of God to the sinner and to celebrate reconciliation with the community as the effective symbol of reconciliation with God.»¹⁷⁶

With these realities of reconciliations existing in the Church, there are some important convictions: 1) The Church is the place of reconciliation, and with this reality, it is sometimes called the basic sacrament of reconciliation. 2) As an institution that receives the mission of reconciling the people to God, he has to call and offer means of conversion that makes it possible for the people to go back to God. 3) there exists a special form of reconciliation instituted by

Christ to deal on grave sin that destroys charity. 4) The Church as a basic sacrament of reconciliation and as a source of the reconciliation of its members can never modify or change the way Christ has willed how man with grave sins has to be reconciled to him. She can be the source of reconciliation or offer some means in inviting and promoting reconciliation, but «cannot alter the will of God including his establishing of the sacrament.»¹⁷⁷ 5) It is true that the ministry of the forgiveness of sins is given to the Church, but the power is solely given to the apostles and to their successors.

The ministry of reconciliation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation refer to two different realities. While it is true that «the ministry of reconciliation belongs rather to the Christian community that exercise it through a president, a minister,»¹⁷⁸ the authority to forgive sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation belongs solely to the ordained ministers because it is to them that the power is given by Christ.

In conclusion, the other means of reconciliation cannot be treated as options but they have a certain importance and relevance in a certain case. The role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Church cannot be substituted with the role of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and vice versa. «It is to be recalled that the Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins – that is proper to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church.»¹⁷⁹ As the CCC mentions «The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church... and anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.»¹⁸⁰ Neither also can the Sacrament of Baptism be substituted by any form of reconciliation.

2.2. *The Significance of the Distinction of Sin*

The existence of the two kinds of sin is very helpful in understanding the role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the salvation of man. One cannot deny the increasing emphasis and understanding of reconciliation in terms of the ministry of the Church. It is reconciliation that refers to a wider sense.

With the existence of different ways of reconciling oneself to God, then what makes the Sacrament of reconciliation different to others? Can one make Reconciliation as an alternative way of asking for forgiveness? When one says the act of contrition during the start of the mass, does he need to avail of the

Sacrament of Reconciliation? The answer to this question is identified with the existence of the distinction of the gravity of sin.

The question of the necessity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation comes to the mind of some of the faithful when they learn about the existence of different ways of reconciling oneself to God. A wrong understanding of the means of reconciliation can affect the way a faithful deals with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The knowledge of the two kinds of sin is important. «This is of great importance for the pastoral aspect of the Sacrament of Reconciliation about the difference between mortal and venial and the necessity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in relation to grave sin.»¹⁸¹

Though different forms of reconciliation exist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation still has a very unique and special place of reconciliation in the Church. It is because the Sacrament of Reconciliation has a specific matter which is distinct to the matter of other forms of reconciliation. The matter is the grave sin committed after baptism, a sin which disrupts his relationship with God, a sin that destroys charity; and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the only ordinary reconciliation that restores the sanctifying grace lost by grave sins. «The theme that is important to determine the necessity of the sacrament is the establishment of the criteria that help to delimit the grade of gravity of the sin being committed.»¹⁸²

It is a sin that only God can restore, and the only ordinary way to restore this relation is through means that God has offered through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and not any other form of reconciliation. Other means of reconciliation cannot forgive grave sins committed after baptism.

Let us take a look at the two other sacraments. Holy Eucharist forgives only non-grave sins and the sacrament of Baptism as reconciliation has nothing to do with the forgiveness of the sins committed after one is baptized. The other forms of reconciliation are only concerned with the non-grave sins. In this way, the Sacrament of Reconciliation can never be considered as a substitute or an alternative since it is the only ordinary means of forgiving grave sins after Baptism.¹⁸³

It has been observed in some of the manuals that while most of the authors mention different kinds of reconciliation, few mention that the concern of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is different from the matter that other forms of reconciliation are dealing with. The authors do not have any intention to make other forms of reconciliation as alternatives. In fact, the authors just follow what the Second Vatican Council states to give emphasis on Christ as the source of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The danger of focusing so much on the concept of reconciliation without taking into consideration the distinction of sins makes the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an alternative. L. Mick mentions, «the distinction of the mortal and venial sin is becoming less important in recent years. Nevertheless the distinction is helpful since there are actions that are totally rejecting God and there are which do not.»¹⁸⁴

Awareness of these distinctions is very important to every member of the Church so that he becomes aware of the necessity of confessing one's sin. Without this distinction, man starts to believe that he can be forgiven without availing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He may think that saying the penitential rite is adequate for the forgiveness of all his sins. We miss the point if we consider all sins as can be forgiven by any kind of penitential rites. «After all, the greatest thing to be feared is falling into grave sin since this immediately deprives one of the life of grace and carries the threat of eternal punishment if one should die unrepentant.»¹⁸⁵

This distinction is not something that the Church has invented, but rather it is based on the Sacred Scripture. «The grave sin deprives the friendship with God, of the Charity and of the sanctifying grace.»¹⁸⁶ Man is incapable to restore this kind of sin that takes away the sanctifying grace. Only God can restore it back, and it is in a way He established it. It is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that He has instituted that Christ offers his mercy and forgiveness of grave sins.

So when one asks why is there a sacrament of the forgiveness of sins? The answer is very simple, because people are still capable of committing sin after baptism. But why need a sacrament if the Eucharist is already considered a sacrament of reconciliation from the very beginning? It is because the church is aware that the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is more concerned of the daily non grave sins committed by the faithful and they are aware that there is a grave sin which destroys his relationship with God. Without a clear distinction of the gravity of sin, then the institution of the sacrament will never be understood and appreciated.

2.3. Effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

M. Hellwig presents the evident experience and complaint of the faithful regarding the effects of the sacrament. It is why the effect does not manifest in their experience.

The Church enumerates some of the effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They are «reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace, reconciliation with the Church, remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins, remission, at least in part, of temporal punishment resulting from sin, peace and serenity of conscience and spiritual consolation, and an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.»¹⁸⁷

The effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are not more of taking away restlessness, discontentment, emotional insecurity, doubts and fear, but more on the spiritual dimension of man. Although there are some cases that the effect can also take away restlessness and other negative feelings but the sacrament is more of forgiveness and cleansing of the soul. Benedict XVI describes the effect of the sacrament in a spiritual dimension that allows the person to transform himself and becomes worthy to be called son of God again. He states, «Confession becomes a spiritual rebirth that transforms the penitent into a new creature. Only God's grace can work this miracle, and it is accomplished through the words and gestures of the priest.»¹⁸⁸

The problem on the misunderstanding of the effect of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is rooted in the loss of the spiritual and religious concern of man. R. Gula has the same observation how other people try to view the sacrament. According to him, «sin loses its religious meaning, reconciliation is completed on the horizontal plane and the sacramental celebrations of forgiveness are replaced by encounter groups. No doubt people claim why do I need the sacrament of reconciliation when I have my support group.»¹⁸⁹

The loss of spiritual concern makes the sacrament irrelevant during the present period. The world is already more concerned with physical and emotional aspects. They become more concerned with temporal needs and healing of pains rather than the spiritual needs and healing of soul. They do not believe on the spiritual effect of the Sacrament since for them they do not manifest in their experience. They are expecting emotional healing that sometimes in the sacrament never occurs. One fails to see and understand the Sacrament of Reconciliation because one is expecting it to be what it is not.

People are expecting that the sacrament of reconciliation can bring them peace of mind and can lead them to forget their traumatic experiences that have been haunting them for years. For some, they think that the sacrament can be an escape of the past experiences and mistakes. «In current pastoral care, and theology, the question is no longer that of how I can obtain forgiveness but of how I can forgive and thus be liberated from the hurts of the

past.»¹⁹⁰ It is not anymore of a relationship with God but more on how he can get away from the uneasiness that he experiences. «Similarly, the forgiveness that is sought is not primarily God's or divine forgiveness but instead the forgiveness of the victim... This shift in attention is caused by a growing care for the victims and a sense for the need to act on their behalf.»¹⁹¹ The spiritual concern and religious entity is starting to fade away. But it is not what the sacrament primarily gives.

If ever there is a tendency to lose the spiritual aspect of the effect of the Sacrament is because of too much emphasis on the aspect of reconciling man to one another and man's search of true conversion and real healing of pain that he experiences. But even though the emphasis changes, one cannot just change the real essence and effect of the sacrament.

«The offense against God is the very essence of sin»¹⁹² Therefore the sacrament is primarily a remission of sins. John Paul II has called the faithful to have a deeper understanding of the Sacrament and what it brings to the Church. «The confession of sins cannot be therefore reduced to a mere attempt at psychological self-liberation even though it corresponds to that legitimate and natural need, inherent in the human heart, to open oneself to another.»¹⁹³

To bring back the full appreciation of the necessity of the sacrament is to bring back the spiritual concern of the person. Being unaware of how man ruptures his relationship with God, leads to blindness of the real effect of the sacrament in the life of a person. In the sacrament «effects resort in the raising of the spiritually dead to the life of grace and called a grace of healing because by it, with the sinner's willing cooperation, the wounds of sin are cured.»¹⁹⁴

According to M. Hellwig, «under an old way of thinking about sin, grace and salvation, there would be an easy answer to this. The effect is hidden and supernatural. One may answer that the effect is hidden, it is supernatural, or it needs faith to feel the effects. But still, it never convinced the people who are thirsty to experience and feel transformation. For them grace is personal transformation and a person cannot be graced without being transformed.»¹⁹⁵

The observation that the Sacrament does not manifest in the personal experience of man, is not an absolute observation. There are already many people who have given testimony regarding the wonderful experience after they have availed of the sacrament, and most of them are those who have made a good preparation before going to confession. They experience the love and

mercy of God, tranquility of soul after they receive the Sacrament. Benedict XVI confirms this reality in his message to the confessors when he says, «How many people in difficulty seek the comfort and consolation of Christ! How many penitents find in confession the peace and joy that they sought for so long!»¹⁹⁶ If ever some fail to experience and feel what the Sacrament of Reconciliation can give, it may be because of the lack of preparation and contrition, doubts, and wrong expectations.

If there are those who have forgotten the spiritual effect and dimension of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, there are those who expect too much about it. They think that when a person confesses his sin, his sin is forgiven and can avoid committing sin anymore. They expect that after they go to confession, there will be a great change in them but failed to experience it. «Underlying the dissatisfaction of the priest and penitent is the belief that there should be a vital reconciliation through this sacrament, a dynamic change in the life of the penitent. Thus, they end up saying, why go to confession when one can commit mistakes again.»¹⁹⁷ It never derives any profit and remain a sinner, cannot abandon sin, and those who confess are even worse than others.

Confession to a priest is not a guarantee for a person not to commit sins again and does not make him super human. It is not one of the effects of the sacrament. The Sacrament of Reconciliation forgives sins, but do not take away concupiscence. «It does not mean that when you step out of the confessional you will be haloed and ready for heaven.»¹⁹⁸ To expect this reality is to destroy the real essence of the sacrament. Frequent good confession can somehow help us fight the temptations.

According to John Paul II, most of the time it also brings changes in the life of a person. «Obviously, sacramental confession is not to be confused with a support system or with psychotherapy. However, neither should we underestimate the fact that the sacrament of Reconciliation, when correctly celebrated, also has a humanizing effect, which is in perfect harmony with its primary purpose of reconciling the individual with God and the Church.»¹⁹⁹

2.4. *Issues on Justification*

It is evident that the issue of justification has not been given an emphasis in the celebration of the sacrament of Penance. The image of the loving and merciful God is the focus. It is the image of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, who calls, waits and forgives no matter who we are. On the oth-

er hand, the reality on punishment, justice, condemnation, and hell is rarely mentioned in the discussion of the sacrament.

It is understandable why K. Osborne insists on the need of giving emphasis on justification. Aside from the less mentioning of the issue on justification and punishment, it is also evident how the Church previously gives emphasis on the acts of the penitent. There is even a tendency to consider the process of conversion as purely an act of man. «It seems that there is no sufficient awareness that conversion is a gift of God... maybe there is no sufficient explicit awareness that the first movement towards conversion is grace, and to experience it is a motive of profound joy and gratitude.»²⁰⁰ But in reality, conversion is not primarily an action of man but it is a gift of God. It is his initiative to which we comply.

The theology is very successful in presenting the image of God as a merciful God. It is a great contribution to the Church. It enhances the sinners to go back to the Church and purify his intention and from being imperfect to a perfect contrition. Nevertheless, when some of the authors hide the reality of justification and punishment, the reality of the sacrament is not presented in its totality. Whether we like it or not, the reality of hell is there, and no matter if we do not tell the sinners about it, he would still suffer the fire of hell if he is not going to repent.

Of course the theology about justification is not more of presenting a God who punishes evildoers and loves those who are faithful to him. It is not the idea that Christ has presented in the prodigal son, but rather it is more of presenting the consequence of sin if one does not repent. It is the way of life that the prodigal son experiences after he commits sins, that he even feels he is less fortunate compared to the servants.

The academic program and classroom presentation are good illustrations in explaining the reality of sin and justification. When a child does not pass the examination because he fails to study, the failing grade that he receives is not a punishment nor a sanction given by the teacher. It is a consequence or a result of what he has done. The issue of justification does not discredit the all-loving God who continues to love his children. It shows that he is just and merciful at the same time. The awareness of the consequence of sin and the justice of God even moves the person towards conversion.

A radical presentation of a merciful and loving God who does not mind our sinfulness somehow blinds the people to see the doctrine of justification. John Paul II even considers «the shift from too much emphasis on the fear

of eternal punishment they pass to preaching a love of God that excludes any punishment deserved by sin, as one of the causes of the decline of the sacrament.²⁰¹

One has to consider that fear and love are neither opposing realities nor does the existence of punishment diminish the reality of God as abundant in love and mercy. The holy fear of God is an aid for us to avoid committing sin. «Fear is not all negative. It can stimulate attention and effort. Excluding every trace of fear from catechetical and preaching seemingly also exclude something fundamental to human beings.»²⁰²

There are two questions presented by K. Osborne regarding the issue on justification. They are the absolute gratuity and complete adequacy of the saving act of God. Using these two issues, he questions the need of some conditions and requirements of the celebration, specifically that of the third rite. He asks why focuses on the acts of man if God's forgiveness is freely given. Does it mean that the mercy of God is dependent on the response of man, on the act of confession and penance, and on the conditions given by the Church? How can one reconcile the reality that forgiveness of God is freely given if there are some conditions and obligations?

But is there really an opposing position between the doctrine of absolute gratuity of the mercy of God, and the essential acts of the penitent? It cannot be denied that God forgives without limits. «We must recall our role in Christ's redemption. He does not choose to redeem our lives without our consent and personal effort. The sacraments are not black magic. Penance is not a free ticket but an emphasis about the struggle required of us. It is that clear reminder that even the mercy of God humbly stands and knocks at the door of our freedom.»²⁰³ «The profound reason of the human action that we find in the same nature of justification is because God cannot justify without our free participation. It is the same that sin supposes a free act of the will and is also presupposed in the forgiveness of sins. The true rejection of sin implies the free submission to the will of God, manifested in Christ and in the Church. By this reason the rejection of sin implies the need to confess and to expiate sin.»²⁰⁴

«Penance can never be understood as earning the mercy of God, but is a token and manifestation of a change of heart. It is only man's response to the proclamation of God's forgiveness, and in gratitude to God's free act of forgiving grace,»²⁰⁵ In no way can forgiveness be earned because it is freely given, nor can one purchase or merit God's love because love is always a gift. Pardon is freely given.

There is no sin that is beyond the power of God's mercy and beyond the limit of absolution. If ever the response of man is required, it is because God does not force us to go back to him, as the father in the prodigal son never forced his son to go back but waited for his son to return. If ever man does not receive the mercy of God, it does not mean that the power of God is limited but rather it is a refusal of man to the grace of penance by not repenting. Surely, everybody who comes with sincere repentance is always forgiven.

But on the other hand, «God wants human beings to have something more, a participation in His own divine life, and that participation is sanctifying grace. It is something added to his nature. He receives sanctifying grace by which he is cleansed from the guilt of his sins and restored to the friendship of God.»²⁰⁶

In conclusion, the grace of God is freely given, but the importance of the response of man and some conditions do not negate the absolute gratuity of the grace. Conversion and justification are always an action of God and a response of man. «Justification involves two complementary steps – the sinners' awareness of their sinfulness through the grace of God and their desire to return to God through participation in the mystery of salvation.»²⁰⁷

3. THE NEED TO BALANCE THE DIFFERENT SHIFTS OF EMPHASES

The Church has experienced nowadays some shifts of emphasis. There were many changes in the Church during the past three decades and it bears the word *new*. «There's the new Rite of Reconciliation, the new theology, the new approach, new concept. There is even a new consciousness of sin, community, self and God.»²⁰⁸ This shift of emphasis is intended to express the theology in a way that it is best understood. The shift of emphasis is not to discard the essential elements in the past but to integrate it to the new emphasis.

The danger that the Church has always experienced is the too much emphasis to a new dimension to the extent of setting aside the previous emphasis. They even consider it as a hindrance or opposing to each other. It is the tendency to dichotomize the sacrament to a new emphasis.

There are many dimensions where the theology is reduced to one aspect. Some authors and theologians have a tendency to consider the sacrament as solely communal celebration after experiencing a very private celebration in the past. With the new emphasis of social sin, the awareness of personal sin

declines. With the too much emphasis given to the sacrament as reconciliation, they disregard the judicial and medicinal aspect of the sacrament. With the increasing concept of conversion as a primarily an act of God, there is a tendency to disregard the act and response of man, believing that grace and sacrament is absolutely gratuity.

The shift of emphasis is not something negative. The theology needs to be progressive and not stagnant. The development helps the church to understand the real essence of the theology and give importance to an aspect that has been neglected before. All of the shifts of emphases give support in making the celebration more meaningful. They give a clearer understanding of the reality of the Church.

These shifts that happen in the sacrament if they are always regulated can accomplish what the Council is trying to point out. These emphases express the real essence of the sacrament and the series of renovations and changes of the rites brings color and makes the liturgy more meaningful. «Many people have come to a more positive and loving view of God than they had before the council.»²⁰⁹ But when they are not regulated, then it can cause tensions and confusions.

There are many theologians and authors who are misled with the change of emphases that instead of promoting the sacrament, they become the source of confusions. The present study is going to deal on the different shifts of emphases that affect the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and how the misinterpretation of the shift affects the existing crisis of the sacrament.

3.1. *Different Attitudes on the Shifts of Emphasis*

The changes that happened during the Vatican II give different attitude to different persons. We can categorize them into three as progressive, moderate and conservative. Obviously, those who are progressive really desire for an absolute change, while the conservative wants to stick to the old practice. The tension between these groups is being felt until now although they do not make the tension visible. Nevertheless, the content of their books, manuals and their personal claim shows that the tension continues.

What is very interesting is that the moderate is hesitant of the too much progressive happening in the Church, especially with the claim of making the general absolution as an ordinary rite without any conditions. «While many progressives applaud the new church, moderates as well as conservatives have

their reservations.»²¹⁰ The reason why the moderates reacted negatively is because the progressive want to disregard even the essential aspect for the sake of progress.

The authors feel that it is either or but can never be both. If they feel that there exists a new emphasis, then they assume that they need to get rid of the previous so that they can accent to the new development. Misconception happens when one focuses on just one side of the reality of the sacrament, and gets rid of the other side.

But one has to bear in mind that it is not the idea of the Church to consider the previous practice erroneous whenever she calls for a renewal or for a shift of emphasis. The church is trying to bring back what was being neglected in the past while not sacrificing the essential aspect of the present. It is a calling to balance the different aspects of the sacrament.

3.2. *Laxity and Severity*

The invitation to balance the important dimensions is something that John Paul II poses. He observes the existence of laxity and severity. Let us focus first on the two extreme claims that John Paul II presents in his letter to the priests. He bases his statement with the biblical passage of the calling of Zacchaeus. «Christ called Zacchaeus first and Zacchaeus in return responds and opens not only his house but also his heart, Then John Paul II reminds the danger of laxity and severity.²¹¹

Laxity is the failure to take into account the fact that the fullness of salvation, is not just offered but must also be accepted. It is a belief that man does not need to do something because God has already saved us. The question of Osborne regarding the issue on the absolute gratuity and complete adequacy of the saving act of Christ falls in this category.

Severity is the other extreme that is the failure to take account that conversion is primarily God's initiative. It is giving more weight on the act of man rather than on the act of God as if conversion begins in man. This claim will also lead to the understanding that God's grace is a response to the conversion made by man. This is what Osborne wants to criticize.

John Paul II states that *Severity* crushes people and drives them away. *Laxity* is misleading and deceptive. That is why he invites the Church to make the mercy already present and at work and the pardon which brings healing and peace. With an attitude of openness to love and reparation for the harm

done and without a firm commitment to living a new life, he would not have received in the depths of his heart the forgiveness that the Lord had offered him with such concern.²¹² John Paul is concerned to balance the two realities of conversion. While Osborne tries to argue the laxity, his argument falls to the other extreme of severity.

3.3. *Communal and Personal Dimension*

There are different dimensions in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that need to be balanced. The first is the communal emphasis of the sacrament since this is the very obvious shift after the Vatican Council that affects the celebration of the sacrament. If ever the Church has given much emphasis on the communal nature, it is because that is what is missing. But now that the awareness of the communal nature is present and while the personal dimension is still considered, it is now the right time to balance the two. There is a need to promote both communal and personal aspects otherwise we will just commit the same mistake in the future.

It has been mentioned how some consider the individual private confession blinding the communal celebration. But now, the too much emphasis of the communal celebration blinds the faithful from the personal and private obligation to confess his personal sins. «Since the revised rites of the sacrament which promotes the communal aspect of the celebration have been issued and implemented, the individual celebration of the sacrament has continued to decline.»²¹³

K. Osborne who is one of the authors who want to promote the communal dimension of the sacrament claims that the «new ritual of reconciliation instructs us that all sin is an offense against the community. There is no such thing as a complete private or personal sin. So we are instructed that reconciliation at all levels is both reconciliation with God and reconciliation with the community.»²¹⁴ And he ends up there. K. Osborne fail to mention that while it is true that there is no such thing as personal sin which does not harm others, it is also true that there is no such thing as social sin which does not involve personal responsibility. Sin and reconciliation are always personal and communal.

It cannot be denied that the communal aspect in the past if not missing, is inadequately expressed. K. Osborne even mentions that the prayer of the act of contrition ‘O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you...’,

no where can we find the communal aspect where a person offends the community. Nevertheless, the inadequacy of the past is not enough to deny the personal aspect in the present theology.

The imbalance is not what the Church wants to happen. It is not what the Council is trying to implement. The Council is recommending the communal aspect without sacrificing the individual aspect of the sacrament. The Church does not consider the social and ecclesial nature and effect of the sacrament as put into the background and relatively unimportant. Neither also does the church give too much emphasis on the communal aspect to the extent of taking away the personal aspect.

What is in the mind of the Church is to give attention to the communal aspect and integrate them to the personal aspect. It is true that the Vatican II has called for a more communal celebration, but it does not disregard the personal celebration of the sacrament nor mention that the previous celebration is wrong. It only encourages integration of the communitarian aspect to the celebration without sacrificing the integral parts of the sacrament.

The problem here is that some consider «communal celebrations as competing with individual confession»²¹⁵ They think that they cannot be celebrated together. Those who are in favor with the communal celebration give all the reasons to promote the more communal celebration and even for some, criticize the individual celebration, trying to eliminate the necessity of the individual confession. The same thing with the other extreme who promotes the individual confession as if the communal celebration is a threat to the integrity of confession.

What the church is calling is to balance the two, that is a celebration that involves communal celebration without disregarding the importance of the individual celebration, or an individual confession with an atmosphere of communal celebration. «The process of reconciliation involves two dimensions, personal and ecclesial. Both dimensions are complementing each other. With this, we make the celebration communitarian and preserve the personal aspect of the celebration so that the individual celebration does not lose its liturgical meaning.»²¹⁶

One has to realize the importance of both personal and communitarian aspect of the sacrament. While the Church promotes the communal nature of the celebration, one has to remember that it has also a personal dimension that must not be taken for granted. The celebration must always have a communal and individual aspect.

3.4. *Three Models of the Sacrament*

C. Walsh presents three models in celebrating the sacrament, namely, the judicial model, therapeutic model, and relational model that refers to judicial, medicinal and reconciliation, respectively. These three models have been the subject of debate and issues to some theologians. It depends on what aspect they are going to give emphasis. Now, that reconciliation is the emphasis, many of the authors criticize the judicial model and consider it as a hindrance to celebrate the sacrament meaningfully.

The present problem in reducing the sacrament as solely concerned with reconciliation is the tendency to identify the sacrament to other reconciliatory celebrations in the Church. «It is one thing to say that the sacrament of penance is concerned with reconciliation, and the reconciliation is to be seen within the whole context of Christian life and sacramental celebration.»²¹⁷ On the other hand, if it is clear that the sacrament has a medicinal and judicial dimension according to how it is instituted by Christ, then never can they claim that the sacrament is considered an alternative.

It is evident that the language of judicial and medicinal are given less importance especially that those terms and concept do not promote reconciliation and communal understanding. There are some who try to take away the judicial dimension of the sacrament, so that it can fully celebrate the communal dimension. «It is clear from all the new forms that an effort has been made to rid the celebration of both its judicial connotations and the excessively individualistic notion of sin and forgiveness which have been a feature of its practice since the later middle ages.»²¹⁸

But the Church is calling to balance these three realities of the sacrament. They are complementing each other. It is true that reconciliation is God's initiative but conversion is always a response and a participation of man. While man needs to be reunited with someone, it is also significant to heal himself.

The other consequence of the shifts of model is the shift of the understanding of the role of the minister. «The minister was previously considered as judge who has to know the case in order to pronounce the sentence. So his concern is to insure the integrity of the confession.»²¹⁹ Or he is also considered a physician who takes care of the spiritual illness of the faithful. But now with the focus on reconciliation, the role of the minister as a judge is given less consideration, and gives more attention as a minister of reconciliation.

There is nothing wrong with giving emphasis on one of these three models as long as he recognizes the importance and the essentiality of the others. There is no doubt that the term reconciliation expresses more the real essence of the sacrament. «The word reconciliation expresses well the manifestation of the ministry of the Church in the sacrament. It is one of the sources that include preaching, prayer and service. It has also some advantage to synchronize with the biblical theology of covenant. It also manifest the different effects to the Church and to the community, and it manifests the healing character of the sacrament»²²⁰

Therefore, while the emphasis today is given to the relational model, there is also a need to maintain the two other models that are the medicinal and judicial because they form one single celebration taken in different perspective. It is healing of the wounds in the therapeutic model, forgiveness of sins in the judicial model, and reconciliation and restoration of relationship in the relational model. Never does any of each model oppose any of them. Furthermore, the term reconciliation connotes medicinal and judicial character. «Reconciliation repairs the wrong deeds, intends to heal the wound and consequences that search for a new state of relationship, presupposes justice, brings forgiveness and peace and it has its model in Christ.»²²¹

3.5. *Fundamental Elements of the Sacrament*

This part deals on the different fundamental elements that have existed throughout the history of the sacrament, namely the three essential acts of the penitent and the absolution of the priest.

The problem that the Church experiences is the understanding that one area hinders the others as if they are contrary or an obstacle to each others. With the present rites of penance, some of the authors want to take away the needs of confession in the third rite of penance because it hinders the practice of general absolution. The sacrament has experienced being reduced to a single act as if it is just an alternative to go to confession. «All the sacraments have suffered through the centuries from a tendency to reduce them to the bare minimum. Fruitful celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation today can be fostered by careful attention to all three of these elements of the sacrament.»²²²

Through out the history the name of the sacrament changes depending on what aspect of the celebration is given importance or emphasis but it does

not mean that the other forms or elements are neither less essential nor not essential at all. One has to remember that each name signifies one reality of the sacrament. The prominent names may be confession, reconciliation and penance, but there are still more names like conversion, forgiveness, justification and others. The different names stress one reality of the sacrament. «Each of these names has its own legitimacy, and an over stress of one without the other diminishes the mystery of God's forgiving love, which the sacrament celebrates.»²²³ There is nothing wrong, when somebody wants to emphasize something which has been given less emphasis during the previous years, but to over stress it to the extent of sacrificing or removing one dimension of the sacrament is another story.

The act of confession may be relevant but it does not mean that the act of telling one's sin suffices the forgiveness of sins. Without sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment, confession has no significance. Neither also is a penitent forgiven in confession without receiving an absolution from the minister. It is very necessary to consider the whole acts and celebration of the sacrament and not to dichotomize them. They are connected to each other and each of the acts makes the sacrament.

They compose one single and integrated act wherein the different parts are essential in the celebration of the sacrament. According to Dallen «The acts of the penitent and the absolution of the minister are inseparable as intimately united as body and soul. Together they transform the sinner into a penitent forgiven by God. They do this by bringing about a love of God above all things, and this is the way that God's forgiveness is realized in our experience.»²²⁴

The essential parts of the sacraments are always present, but the order of the celebration may change. In the early Church, the penitent confesses his sins to the bishops or to his representative, then he is given a public penance or sometimes is required to have a public confession, then only later on that he receives the absolution after fulfilling the long penance. Before the Council of Trent, the order is confession, then absolution and the penitent does his penance. While during the time that confession is physically impossible, absolution is given prior to penance and confession. But never can every rite be understood as eliminating one of the elements.

There are some consequences of the shift of emphasis. The idea of reconciliation takes away the practice of having lists of sins during confession. The attention is given not already to sin, but to sinfulness. The focus is al-

ready on relation with God and with others rather than norms. Focusing with sin is to look more carefully with the norms and with what is mandated, while sinfulness focuses on a person and relationship. While focusing in sinfulness, the penitent becomes aware of the need of conversion not just asking for forgiveness of sins. «The practice of confession focused more on sins than on sinfulness, acts rather than attitudes; it deals with symptoms rather than the real disease. Individual acts are usually symptoms. The real disease of sin most often stems from the half conscious attitudes and complex situations in which a person's freedom or lack of it becomes involved.»²²⁵

Therefore, there is a need to consider all essential acts as important in the celebration of the sacrament. It must not be regarded as essential part of the celebration of the sacrament unless it is impossible to make it. As has been stated, is that the Church from the very start has celebrated the sacrament with contrition, penance, confession and absolution of the priest. These parts are essential not without any basis but has its foundation on tradition and the practice of the early Church.

3.6. *Theological and Pastoral Emphasis*

To give balance on the theological and pastoral emphasis is very essential in understanding the celebration of the sacrament especially during this time that the sacrament experiences crisis. This balance can bring the sacrament to the right direction. The tension on the formulation of the rites of penance and the continued questions and issue on the third rites belong to the unbalanced emphasis of theological and pastoral dimensions of the sacrament. There are some theologians and authors who lost the right track of the call of Vatican II of the renewal of the celebration of the sacraments. To implement the pastoral dimension of the sacrament, many writers call for a change of perception of the sacrament. They focus more on how to make it very pastoral without taking into consideration if it affects the essential parts of the celebration. The focus is already more on man rather than on what God has offered to man.

What the church tries to revise is the way it is celebrated and the doctrine and the mercy of God being expressed, but not the content and the message of the doctrine. One has to take note that «the new rite of penance does not change the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin, but the experience of forgiveness through sacramental confession is now meant to be a new kind of experience, for penitent and confessor alike.»²²⁶

What is this doctrinal teaching of the church regarding the sacrament that is questioned by the radical pastoral claim of some of the authors? The theological teaching of the sacrament is based on the different statements of the Council of Trent regarding the necessity of the sacrament, its Divine institution, the authority given to the apostles and to his successors to forgive sins, the judicial character of the Church's power to forgive sins, the integral parts, the minister of the sacrament and so on.²²⁷

The radical implementation of pastoral aspect is to make the rites always available to the faithful to the extent of questioning the teachings of the Church and the statement pronounced by the Council of Trent regarding the conditions given to a particular rite. On the other hand, those who insist on the theological aspect of reconciliation are in favor of making the celebration more pastoral and meaningful, but not to the extent of sacrificing the doctrine of the Church, the past practices, and the way Christ has instituted it. The latter group has safeguarded and preserved the teaching of the Church about the necessity of the integral formation in the celebration of the sacrament.

The call of the Church in making the celebration more pastoral is to explain the meaning of the theological foundation of the sacrament, express them in the celebration, and make the integral parts meaningful in the celebration. Although the concern of the Church is to make the celebration more pastoral, this pastoral concern must always be based on the theological aspect of the sacrament. As J. Dallen states, «Pastoral benefit is always the major consideration, but there is a need to internalize its theological foundations.»²²⁸

Notes

1. M. HELLWIG, *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion*, p. 73.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
3. R. GULA, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 90.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
5. Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 92.
6. Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
8. Walter WOODS, *Book Review*, in R. GULA, *To walk Together Again*, in *TS* 46, 1 (March 1985) 141.
9. R. PEDRIZETTI, *To Walk Together Again*, in *Worship*, p. 89.
10. K. STASIAK, *Book review* in L. MICK, *Penance the Once and Future Sacrament*, in «Worship» 62, 5 (September 1988) 471-472.
11. Cfr. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 43.
12. Carl PETER, *Book Review* in K. OSBORNE, *Reconciliation and justification*, in *TS* 52, 2 (January 1991) 364.
13. Cfr. José MILLÁS, *Book Review* in K. OSBORNE, *Reconciliation and justification*, in «Gregorianum» 73, 3 (1992) 551.
14. J. DALLEN, *Book Review* in K. OSBORNE, *Reconciliation and justification*, in «Worship» 65, 3 (May 1991) 287.
15. Dónal CUILLEANÁIN, *Penance: Decline and Recovery in Position Paper*, 206 (February 1991) 66.
16. Francis MANNION, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, in «Worship» 61, 5 (September 1987) 479.
17. J. DALLEN, *Book Review* in D. Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, in «Worship» 77 (May, 2003) 92.
18. F. MANNION, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, in *Worship*, p. 478.
19. B. COOKE, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, in *TS* 48, 4 (December 1987) 761-762.
20. «The history that J. Dalen presented indicates the broader shift in Catholic practice of penance and reconciliation within which the ritual revision is occurring.» Cfr. B. COOKE, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, p. 761. «He show how at every stage of institutional development, ritual and pastoral modifications were based on shifting comprehensions of the ecclesial dynamics of redemption and conversion. Yet each advance yielded up inherent tensions necessitating further development.» Cfr. F. MANNION, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, p. 478.
21. F. MANNION, *Book Review* in J. DALLEN, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*, p. 478.

22. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2002*, 3, in *AAS* 94, pars 1 (March 17, 2002) 433.
23. Cfr. D. COFFEY, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 145.
24. Cfr. C. WALSH, *The Untapped Power of the Sacrament of Penance*, p. 29.
25. *ReP*, no. 18.
26. Just two years ago, Benedict XVI in his message to the participants in a course on the internal forum organized by the tribunal of the apostolic penitentiary mentions that the loss of the sense of sin is becoming increasingly more wide spread. This shows that the issue on the loss of the sense of sin, which is very evident 30 or 40 years ago, is still a problem now a days. «Colgo, pertanto, volentieri l'occasione per proporre all vostra attenzione alcune riflessioni sull'amministrazione di questo Sacramento nella nostra epoca, che purtroppo va sempre più smarrendo il senso del peccato.» BENEDICT XVI, *Al Partecipanti al Corso Sul Foro Interno Organizzato dalla Penitenzieria Apostolica* (7 Marzo, 2008), in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto*, IV, 1, pp. 371-372.
27. R. GULA, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 4.
28. Cfr. *ReP*, no. 13.
29. F. BUCKLEY, *Reconciling*, p. 63.
30. C. BURKE, *Pastors and Penance in Position Paper*, 262 (October 1995) 6-7.
31. He conveys that, «every individual therefore is invited by the voice of divine truth to examine realistically his or her conscience, and to confess that he or she has been brought forth in iniquity, as we say in the Miserere Psalm.» Cfr. *ReP*. no. 21.
32. J. SANCHO, *Pecado y Gracia*, in J. SANCHO, et al. (eds.), *Reconciliación y Penitencia, V Simposio Internacional De Teología*, p. 310.
33. P. FINK, *Alternative Future for Worship*, vol. IV: *Reconciliation*, p. 44.
34. J. MEDINA ESTEVEZ, *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Intervention on the Presentation of the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II in the Form of Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei*.
35. D. COFFEY, *Book Review* in F. O'LOUGHLIN, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance*, in *TS*, 69, 2 (Jan. 2008) 480.
36. Refer to chapter two of this study.
37. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 40.
38. C. BURKE, *Pastors and Penance*, p. 5.
39. Q. DONOGHUE and L. SHAPIRO, *Bless Me Father, for I have Sinned: Catholic Speak out about Confession*, p. 285.
40. R. GULA, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 4.
41. Cfr. *ReP*, no 16.
42. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2001*, no. 14.
43. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, pp. 23-24.
44. C. BURKE, *Pastors and Penance*, p. 5.
45. P. FINK, *Investigating the Sacrament of Penance: An experiment in sacramental theology*, in «Worship» 54, 3 (May 1980) 208-209.
46. W. MAY, *Sin* in J. KOMONCHAK, et al. (eds.) *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 833.
47. M. SHANNON and T. SHANNON, *Reconciliation in Position Paper* 118 (October 1983) 3.
48. S. CAÑARDO RAMIREZ, *¿Necesita Dios de un Hombre para Perdonarme?: La Penitencia, Un Sacramento Contestado*, p. 75.
49. R. GULA, *Understanding Sin Today*, p. 2.
50. Mt. 5:17.
51. T. PETERS, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*, p. 263-264.
52. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 68.
53. Dt. 30:16.
54. R. GULA, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 100.
55. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 67.

56. P. ANCIAUX, *The Sacrament of Penance*, p. 26.
57. T. PETERS, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*, p. 264.
58. Andreas SNOECK, *Confession and Pastoral Psychology* (Holland: The Mercier Press, 1962) 80.
59. B. PIAULT, *What is sacrament?*, p. 16.
60. CCL, no. 961.
61. CCC, no. 962.
62. «The formulation of the rites has considered the nature of sin as an offense against both God and the Church, simultaneous reconciliation with God and the Church, the whole church collaborating with the sinner's effort at conversion through its charity, example, and prayers, the value of the sacrament of penance in fostering the Christian life; to provide a theological, pastoral and canonical foundation and the suggestion of having alternative formulas.» *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.
63. The three important concern of *Ordo Paenitentiae*, which is communal, conversion experience and changing sense if sin.» Cfr. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 29.
64. «Some observations in the revision of the rites are the change of name to reconciliation, reconciliation presented in relation to Christ and the Church, its relation to baptism and Eucharist, the social nature of sin, the communal nature of sacrament of reconciliation.» Cfr. K. OSBORNE, *Reconciliation and Justification*, pp. 205-210.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
66. M. TAYLOR (ed.), *The Sacraments: Reading In Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, p. 218.
67. «Confessio autem exigit in paenitente voluntatem aperiendi cor suum Dei ministro; in hoc vero, spiritale iudicium quo, in persona Christi agens, pro potestate clavium remissionis aut retentionis peccatorum sententiam pronuntiat.» Cfr. *OP*, no. 6.
68. M. DUDLEY and G. ROWELL (eds.), *Confession and Absolution*, p. 141.
69. J. MEDINA ESTÉVEZ, *Circular Letter Concerning the Integrity of the Sacrament of Penance*, no. 7.
70. S. CAÑARDO RAMÍREZ, *Los Obispos Españoles ante el Sacramento de la Penitencia, Principales Cuestiones Teológicas y Pastorales*, p.117.
71. Cfr. Q. DONOGHUE and L. SHAPIRO, *Bless Me Father, for I have Sinned: Catholic Speak out about Confession*, pp. 272-284.
72. Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 275-284.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
74. R. GULA, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 218.
75. *OP*, no. 31. «*Individualis et integra confession atque absolution manent unicus modus ordianrius, quo fideles se cum Deo et Ecclesia reconciliant, nisi impossibilitas physica vel moralis ab buiusmodi confessione excuset.*» This is also mentioned in CCC, no. 1484, and in CoCL no. 960.
76. *OP*, no. 34.
77. S. CAÑARDO RAMÍREZ, *¿Necesita Dios de un Hombre para Perdonarme?: La Penitencia, Un Sacramento Contestado*, p. 59.
78. B. PIAULT, *What is sacrament?*, p. 21.
79. J. MEDINA ESTÉVEZ, *Circular Letter Concerning the Integrity of the Sacrament of Penance*, no. 1.
80. Cfr. J. MEDINA, *Reflexiones Acerca Del Sacramento de la Penitencia y de su Fundamento Teológico* in J. SANCHE, et al. (eds.), *Reconciliación y Penitencia, V Simposio Internacional De Teología*, p. 528. «Como el signo no puede ser rechazado de antemano por quien tiene un arrepentimiento perfecto, porque ello significaría no adherirse al orden sacramental y a la economía de la salvación, del mismo modo cuando el signo no puede tener su cumplimiento cabal, es preciso que haya la voluntad de completarlo, y que de facto se complete después.»
81. S. CAÑARDO RAMÍREZ, *¿Necesita Dios de un Hombre para Perdonarme?: La Penitencia, Un Sacramento Contestado*, p. 59.
82. P. FINK, *Investigating the sacrament of penance: An experiment in sacramental theology*, in «Worship» 54, 3 (May 1980) 207.
83. F. ROMERAL, *La Penitencia Hoy, Claves para una Renovación*, p. 75.

84. S. CAÑARDO RAMIREZ, *¿Necesita Dios de un Hombre para Perdonarme?: La Penitencia, Un Sacramento Contestado*, pp. 57-58.
85. D. COFFEY, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 90.
86. J. RATZINGER, *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Intervention on the Presentation of the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II in the Form of Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei* (May 2, 2002).
87. L. MICK, *Penance: The Once and Future Sacrament*, p. 88.
88. E. LUIJTEN, *Sacramental forgiveness as a Gift of God. Thomas Aquinas on the Sacrament of Penance*, p. 41.
89. *Ibid.*
90. J. RATZINGER, *Intervention on the Presentation of the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II in the Form of Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei*.
91. J. UPTON, *A Time for Embracing: Reclaiming Reconciliation*, pp. 40-41.
92. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
93. D. COFFEY, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 90.
94. S. CAÑARDO RAMIREZ, *Los Obispos Españoles ante el Sacramento de la Penitencia, Principales Cuestiones Teológicas y Pastorales*, p. 63. «Las posturas se dividirán en dos grupos, claramente diferenciados, a la hora de valorar la obligatoriedad de la misma. Un sector creerá que la presencia de la confesión no será necesaria para que la celebración de la penitencia tenga un carácter sacramental; por ello, aducirán todo tipo de argumentos para restringir su uso, hasta hacer casi inútil o innecesario el recurso a esta práctica. Mientras tanto otra corriente teológica conducirá sus razonamientos hacia la preafirmación de esta práctica.»
95. M. TAYLOR (ed.), *The Sacraments: Reading In Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, p. 205.
96. SC, no 21.
97. J. MEDINA ESTÉVEZ, *Circular Letter Concerning the Integrity of the Sacrament of Penance*, no. 1.
98. S. HAHN, *Lord, Have Mercy, The Healing Power of Confession*, p. 16.
99. J. CHRYSOSTOM, *On Repentance and almsgiving Homily 2:3*, in «Fathers of the Church» 96, p. 16.
100. «The LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites: 'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged'.» (Num. 5:5-7). «Then whoever is guilty in any of these cases shall confess the sin he has incurred, and as his sin offering for the sin he has committed he shall bring to the LORD a female animal from the flock, a ewe lamb or a she-goat. The priest shall then make atonement for his sin.» (Lev. 5:5-6). S. HAHN states «that by giving his people a clear plan of action, God makes it possible for individuals to confess their sins, first he explicitly insists upon such confession, then he gives the sinner something to do – a liturgical act of sacrifice and penance and finally he insists that they do all this with the help and intercession of a priest. All of these elements would survive intact throughout the history of Israel and of the renewed Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ.» S. HAHN, *Lord, Have Mercy, The Healing Power of Confession*, p. 20.
101. Rom. 10:10.
102. Cfr. James 5:14-16. S. Hahn describes this passage as «James is clearly setting the practice of confession in connection with the priest's healing ministry... we go to them for the healing sacrament of forgiveness when our souls are sick with sin, James asks them not to go directly to Jesus, not just in their hearts.», S. HAHN, *Lord, Have Mercy, The Healing Power of Confession*, p. 32.
103. S. HAHN, *Lord, Have Mercy, The Healing Power of Confession*, p. 17.
104. Cfr. Denis O'CALLAGHAN (ed.), *Sin and repentance* (New York: Alba House Division of the Society of St. Paul, 1967) 121-123.
105. *CT*, cap. VII-I, p. 243. «Neque locus ille ioannis de absolutione absque confessione intelligi potest, ut quidam volunt. Absolutio enim et remissio non potest fieri, nisi peccata, quae sint, audiantur et, quae remittenda vel retinenda sint, diiudicentur.»

106. M. PEDRO, *Necesidad de la Confesión en el Concilio de Trento*, in J. SANCHO, et al. (eds.), *Reconciliación y Penitencia, V Simposio Internacional De Teología*, p. 638. «Es cierto que Cristo no menciona para nada la confesión de los pecados... las palabras del relato de San Juan, sin embargo, son de un tenor tal implican necesariamente la confesión o declaración de los pecados al ministro que tiene y ejerce la autoridad de Cristo.»
107. M. PRIEUR, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation Today*. (Pennsylvania: Catechetical Communications, 1974) 26.
108. Cfr. J. MEDINA, *Reflexiones Acerca Del Sacramento de la Penitencia y de su Fundamento Teológico* in J. SANCHO, et al. (eds.), *Reconciliación y Penitencia, V Simposio Internacional De Teología*, p. 528. «La falta de integridad material impide al sacerdote ejercitar su misión de juez.»
109. *ReP*, no. 31.
110. J. DALLÉN, *Sacrament of Penance*, in B. MARTHALER et al. (eds.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 66.
111. O. WATKINS, *A History of Penance*, vol. 1, p. 116.
112. P. PALMER, *Sacrament of Penance*, in W. McDONALD et al. (eds.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 75.
113. J. DALLÉN, *Sacrament of Penance*, in B. MARTHALER et al. (eds.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 69.
114. P. PALMER, *Sacrament of Penance*, in W. McDONALD et al. (eds.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 75.
115. D. BOROBIO GARCÍA, *La Penitencia Como Proceso*, p. 147.
116. M. HELLWIG, *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion*, p. 39, quoting O. WATKINS, *A History of Penance*, vol 1, pp. 422-444.
117. *Ibid.*
118. O. WATKINS, *A History of Penance*, vol 1, p. 115.
119. CLEMENT OF ROME, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, chapter 51:3 in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 48.
120. *Ibid.*, chapter 8:2-3, p. 70.
121. BARNABAS, *The Letter of Barnabas*, chapter 19:12, in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 220-221.
122. DIDACHE, chapter 4:14, in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 175.
123. O. WATKINS, *A History of Penance*, vol. 1, p. 137.
124. J. CHRYSOSTOM, *On Repentance and Almsgiving, Homily 2:1*, in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 96, p. 16.
125. *Ibid.*, *Homily 3:5*, p. 30.
126. *Ibid.*, *Homily 7:12*, p. 95.
127. CYPRIAN, *Treatises To the Lapsed* 29, in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 36, p. 82.
128. CYPRIAN, *Letters to the Priests and Deacons* 11:5, in R. J. DEFERRARI (dir.), *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 51, p. 32. In his other letter to the priest, St. Cyprian mentions «if any should depart from the world after having received a petition from the martyrs, after they had made confession and had hands imposed in penance, they should be sent to the Lord. *Ibid.*, 19:3, p. 54.
129. O. WATKINS, *A History of Penance*, vol. 1, p. 137.
130. *CT*, cap. VII p. 359, «Si quesi negaverit, confessionem sacramentalem vel institutam vel ad salutem necessariam esse iure divino; aut dixerit, modum secrete confitendi soli sacerdoti, que ecclesia catholica ab initio semper observavit et observat, alienum esse ab institutione et mandato Christi, et inventum esse humanum, anathema sit.» The same text can be found in *DH*, p. 553.
131. PAUL VI, *Allocution to the Bishops*, in *AAS*, vol. 70 (20 April 1978) 330.
132. J. MEDINA ESTEVEZ, *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Intervention on the Presentation of the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II in the Form of Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei*.

133. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2002*, no. 4, in *AAS*, vol. 94, pars 1 (March 17, 2002) 433.
134. *MD*, no. 2.
135. *Ibid.*, quoting Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIV, *Doctrina de Sacramento Paenitentiae*, Chap. 5: *DS* 1679; Ecumenical Council of Florence, *Decree for the Armenians* (22 November 1439): *DS* 1323
136. *Ibid.*
137. J. MEDINA ESTÉVEZ, *Circular Letter Concerning the Integrity of the Sacrament of Penance*, no. 1. The Congregation of Divine Worship reinstated the same context in its another statement. «By divine law, it is necessary that penitents confess to a priest all mortal sins as well as any specifying moral circumstances that they remember after a careful examination of conscience.» Congregation for the Divine Worship, and the Discipline of the Sacrament, *The Sacrament of Penance*, March 19, 1999, quoting cfr. Conc. Oecum. Flor., session VIII, *Bulla unionis Armenorum*: Denziger-Schönmetzer 1323; Conc. Oecum. Trid., session XIV, *Canones de sacramento paenitentiae*, cann. 4, 6-9: Denz.-Schön. 1704, 1706-1709; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Sacramentum Paenitentiae* (16 June 1972): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972) 510-514; can. 988, § 1.
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